

~~THE~~ ASIAN  
AMERICAN  
VOTE

2004



A REPORT ON THE MULTILINGUAL  
EXIT POLL IN THE 2004  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

A SPECIAL PROJECT OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND

The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), founded in 1974, protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans through litigation, legal advocacy and community education in the areas of immigrant rights, civic participation and voting rights, economic justice for workers, racially-motivated violence and police misconduct, youth rights and educational equity, affirmative action, and language rights.

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# The Asian American Vote

## A Report on the AALDEF Multilingual Exit Poll in the 2004 Presidential Election

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	1
Methodology .....	3
I. Profile of Survey Respondents .....	4
II. Asian Americans and the Presidential Vote .....	8
Most Important Factor in Vote for President .....	9
Crossover Voting .....	9
III. The Vote by Other Characteristics .....	10
First-Time Voters .....	10
Foreign Born Voters .....	10
Young Voters .....	11
IV. News Sources and Civil Rights Issues .....	12
V. Access to the Vote .....	14
Language Assistance .....	14
Voting Barriers .....	15
Appendix .....	16



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 2, 2004, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), with the help of several co-sponsoring organizations and 1,200 attorneys, law students, and volunteers, conducted the nation's largest nonpartisan, multilingual exit poll of almost 11,000 Asian American voters. The questionnaire was written in 8 languages, and Asian Americans were surveyed in 23 cities in 8 states: New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.<sup>1</sup>

The five largest Asian groups surveyed in 2004 were Chinese (46 %), South Asian (25 %), Korean (14 %), Southeast Asian (6 %), and Filipino (5 %).<sup>2</sup> 82 % were foreign born. 29 % had no formal U.S. education. More than a third (38 %) were first-time voters.

- ***Asian Americans were largely Democratic voters.*** Almost 60 % of Asian Americans were registered Democrats, over a quarter were not enrolled in any political party, and only 1 in 7 Asian Americans were registered Republicans. By a 3 to 1 margin, Asian Americans favored Senator John Kerry over President George W. Bush, 74 % to 24 %, with 2 % voting for other candidates. Among first-time Asian American voters, 78 % voted for Kerry, 20 % voted for Bush, and 2 % voted for other candidates.
- ***Party crossover voting favored Democrats.*** 18 % of all Asian Republicans crossed party lines to vote for Kerry. By contrast, 7 % of Asian Democrats voted for Bush. Among Asian voters not enrolled in any political party, more than two thirds (70 %) voted for Kerry, while 26 % voted for Bush.
- ***Economy/jobs was the most important issue to Asian Americans in voting for President.***

Overall, the most important issues for voters were Economy/Jobs (26 %), followed by the War in Iraq (16 %), Terrorism/Security (16 %) and Health Care (14 %). Asian Americans who voted for Kerry were most influenced by the Economy/Jobs (29 %), followed by the War in Iraq (18 %) and Health Care (15 %). Among Bush supporters, the most important factors influencing their vote for President were Terrorism/Security (33 %), Economy/Jobs (18 %), and the War in Iraq (11 %).

- ***Asian Americans share common political interests, even across ethnic lines.*** Though Asian Americans are diverse, coming from different countries and speaking different languages and dialects, in the political arena there is a fair amount of political unity. Regardless of ethnicity, almost all Asian ethnic groups voted as a bloc for the same candidates and identified common reasons for their vote. Voters were asked to select the most important civil rights/immigrants rights issue from the following choices: Affirmative Action, Civil Liberties, Deportation/Detention, Hate Crimes, Immigration Backlogs, Language Barriers to Services, Legalization of Immigrants, Racial Profiling, Voting/Political

<sup>1</sup> AALDEF has conducted exit polls of Asian American voters in every major election since 1988. Over 5,000 Asian New Yorkers and 3,000 Asian voters in 4 states (NY, NJ, MA, MI) were surveyed in AALDEF's 2000 and 2002 exit polls, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> All percentages are based on total correct responses to survey questions. Questions left blank or incorrectly answered were not included in calculating percentages.



Photo by Joseph Hsu, *World Journal*

Representation, and Workers' Rights. Civil Liberties was the top choice for each ethnic group.

- ***Asian Americans turned to ethnic media outlets for their main source of news.*** More than half (51 %) of all respondents got their news about politics and community issues from the ethnic press, rather than from mainstream media outlets. The ethnic newspaper was the most common source used among those using ethnic sources. 36 % of voters got their news from ethnic media sources in Asian languages.
- ***Language assistance and bilingual ballots are needed to preserve access to the vote.*** 41 % of Asian Americans expressed that they were limited English proficient. 14 % identified English as their native language. A number of poll sites were mandated to provide bilingual ballots and interpreters under the federal Voting Rights Act; other jurisdictions voluntarily provided language assistance. In the 2004 elections, almost a

third of all respondents needed some form of language assistance to vote. The greatest beneficiaries of language assistance (46 %) were first-time voters.

- ***Asian Americans faced many voting barriers.*** Hundreds of voters were directed to the wrong poll site and complained of hostile, rude or poorly trained poll workers. In one instance, 66 % of voters who did not have to show identification were required to provide identification. AALDEF poll monitors and pollsters received more than 600 complaints of voting problems.

Community exit polls paint a different picture of the electorate. Different results are found when exit polls are taken in numerous Asian languages and pollsters resemble the populations they are polling. For example, only 11 % of respondents in the poll conducted by the National Election Pool were first-time voters, whereas over a third (38 %) of those surveyed in AALDEF's multilingual exit poll were first-time voters. Moreover, although the National Election Pool reported that 54 % of Asian Americans voted for Kerry, AALDEF's exit poll found that 74 % of Asian Americans voted for Kerry. Multilingual exit polls reveal vital information about Asian American voting patterns that are regularly overlooked or very different from mainstream voter surveys.

Copies of the report can be obtained online at [www.aaldef.org](http://www.aaldef.org) or by calling the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund at 212.966.5932.

## METHODOLOGY

In November 2004, 1,197 volunteers surveyed 10,789 Asian American voters at 87 poll sites in 23 cities in 8 states (New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Virginia).<sup>3</sup>

Seven of the eight states selected were among the states with the largest Asian American populations in the nation.<sup>4</sup> Cities and poll sites with large concentrations of Asian American voters were selected based on census data and interviews with local elections officials and community leaders. Sites with a history of voting problems were also selected.

Poll sites were covered throughout the day, from open to close, usually 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM. Volunteers were provided by the co-sponsoring organizations, Asian Pacific American Law Student Associations, community-based organizations, and faculty at universities. All volunteers were trained in conducting the exit poll. All were nonpartisan. Volunteers were instructed to approach all Asian voters as they were leaving poll sites and to ask them to complete a questionnaire.<sup>5</sup>

10,789 surveys were collected.<sup>6</sup> The survey questionnaire was written in 7 Asian languages: Chinese, Korean, Bengali, Arabic, Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao, in addition to English. Volunteers were conversant in 23 Asian languages and dialects: South Asian languages (Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, Malayalam, Gujarati, Tamil, Urdu, Kannada, Nepali, Telegu, Marathi), Southeast Asian

languages (Vietnamese, Khmer, Thai), Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Mandarin, Taiwanese, Fukienese, Toisan), Tagalog, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic. About 1 in 3 respondents (32%) completed the translated questionnaire. 5% of voters needed assistance in completing the survey. Assistance included volunteers reading questionnaires aloud to voters or providing translation in another language.



Photo by Benjamin Yuh

<sup>3</sup> A full list of the poll site locations can be found at Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF1) 100-Percent Data. Rhode Island was the only state selected that has a comparatively small Asian American population. The inclusion and exclusion of states depended on the capacity and interest of local groups to co-sponsor the exit poll and mobilize the requisite number of volunteers.

<sup>5</sup> Purposive sampling methodology was employed in this exit poll. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method that involves choosing respondents with certain characteristics.

<sup>6</sup> One hundred non-Asians also voluntarily responded to the exit poll. These surveys, however, were not included in the total sample or the calculation of percentages for this report.

## I. Profile of Survey Respondents

**Ethnicity.** Survey respondents were predominantly Chinese (46 %), South Asian (25 %), Korean (14 %), Southeast Asian (6 %) and Filipino (5 %). South Asian includes respondents of Asian Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indo-Caribbean<sup>7</sup>, Sri Lankan, and Nepalese heritage. Southeast Asian includes Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, Thai, Indonesians, Burmese, and Malaysians. The remaining 4 % of respondents were of other Asian ethnicities, including Japanese, Arab<sup>8</sup>, and multiracial Asians.

**Language.** While 14 % of respondents identified English as their native language, more than 41 % identified one or more Chinese dialects as their native language, 20 % identified one or more South Asian languages, 13 % identified Korean, 5 % identified one or more Southeast Asian languages, 4 % identified Tagalog, 1 % identified Arabic, and 2 % identified some other language.

Among Chinese voters, 54 % selected Cantonese as their native dialect, 28 % chose Mandarin, and 7 % chose another Chinese dialect, including Fukienese, Shanghainese, Toisan, Taiwanese and Hakka. 10 % selected English as their native language, and 1 % spoke another language.

Among South Asian voters, 19 % selected Bengali as their native language, 15 % chose Gujarati, 14 % chose Urdu, 10 % chose Hindi, 6 % chose Malayalam, and 5 % chose Punjabi. 11 % spoke multiple South Asian languages. The remaining 19 % selected English as their native language, and 1 % spoke another language.

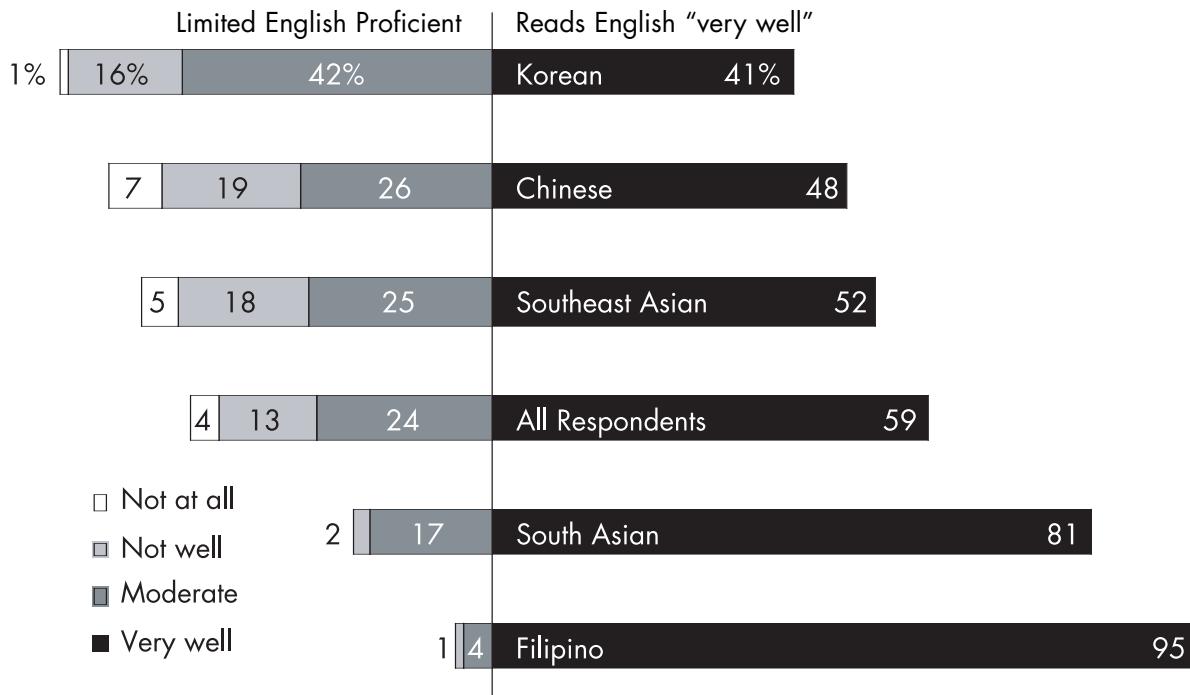
Among Korean voters, nearly 89 % selected Korean as their native language. 10 % selected

Percentage of Voters	Asian Respondents
100%	Total
51	Women
49	Men
46	Chinese
25	South Asian
14	Korean
6	Southeast Asian
5	Filipino
4	Other Asian
25	18 to 29 years old
18	30 to 39 years old
20	40 to 49 years old
18	50 to 59 years old
11	60 to 69 years old
8	70 and over
18	Born in the U.S.
82	Foreign born, naturalized citizen: ..... 14% 0-2 years ago ..... 17% 3-5 years ago ..... 22% 6-10 years ago ..... 47% More than 10 years ago
57	Democrat
15	Republican
26	Not enrolled in any party
2	Other party
38	First-time voter
62	Has voted before
29	No formal education in the U.S. Educated in the U.S., highest level: ..... Elementary school ..... Less than high school ..... High school degree or equivalent ..... Trade school degree ..... College or university degree ..... Advanced degree
1	
2	
6	
4	
42	
16	

<sup>7</sup> Indo-Caribbeans are ethnic Asian Indians who were brought to Caribbean nations, such as Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad, and Jamaica, as indentured servants over a century ago. Beginning in 1980 and throughout the 1990s, they have been migrating to the United States, specifically to New York.

<sup>8</sup> Although the U.S. Census Bureau designates Arabs as White, Arabs were included as Asian for this survey, since South Asians and Arabs faced similar problems of discrimination and racial profiling after September 11.

Figure 1. Ethnicity by Reading Proficiency.



English as their native language, and 1% spoke another language.

Among Southeast Asian voters, 57% selected Vietnamese as their native language, 25% chose Khmer, and 6% chose Laotian. Another 4% spoke Cantonese and/or Mandarin as their native language. 6% selected English as their native language, and 2% spoke another language.

Among Filipino voters, over three-quarters (77%) selected Tagalog as their native language. 22% selected English as their native language, and 1% spoke another language.

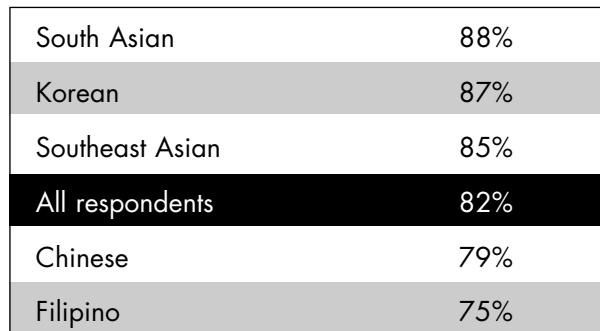
**Limited English Proficiency.** 41% of all respondents were limited English proficient.<sup>9</sup> Korean Americans were the most limited English proficient of all Asian ethnic groups, with 59% indicating that they have at least some difficulty reading English. Similarly, 59% of Vietnamese and 52% of Chinese voters also read English less than “very well.” Among Southeast Asian voters as a whole, 48% were limited English proficient. Among the South Asians polled, Asian Indians were largely proficient in English, while

Bangladeshi and Pakistani voters exhibited higher levels of limited English proficiency, 38% and 26% respectively.

Over a third (37%) of limited English proficient respondents were first-time voters.

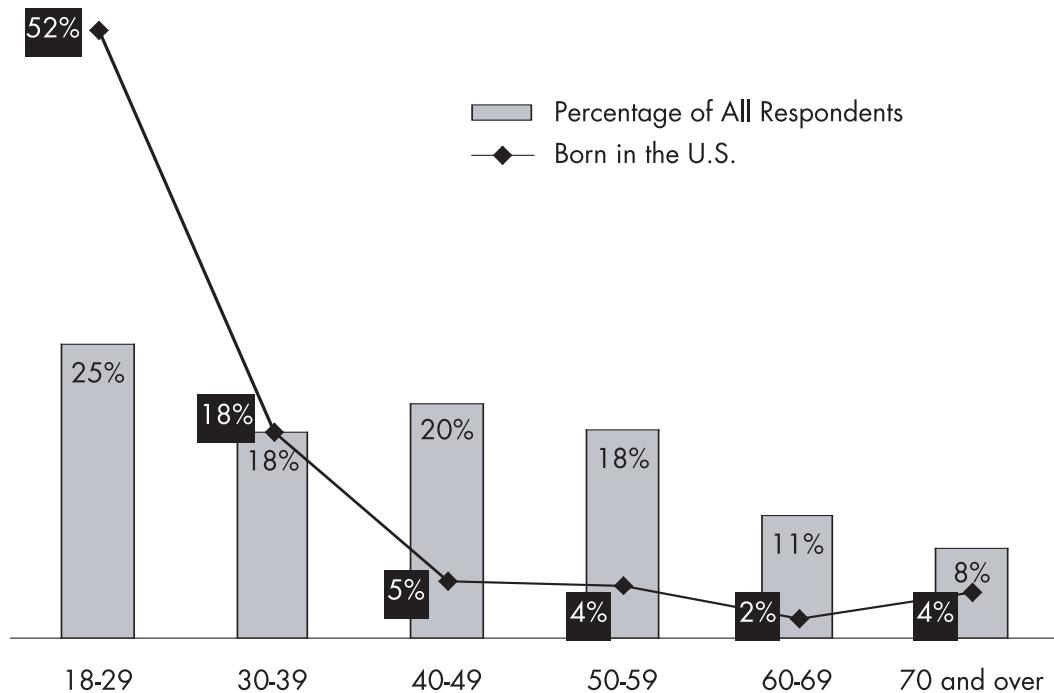
**Foreign Born.** 82% of all respondents were foreign born naturalized citizens, of which almost half (49%) were limited English proficient. 14% of these foreign born voters became U.S. citizens within the last two years, 17% 3 to 5 years ago, and 22% 6 to 10 years ago. 47% of those foreign born were naturalized more than 10 years ago.

Figure 2. Foreign Born.



<sup>9</sup> Limited English proficiency is determined by one's ability to read English less than “very well.”

Figure 3. Age by Nativity.

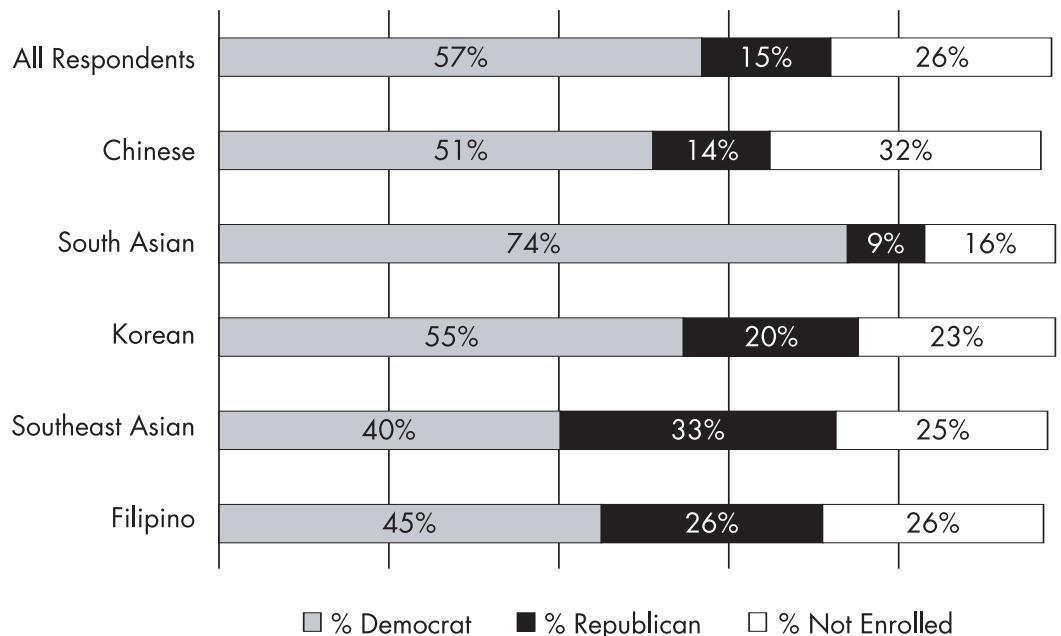


**Age.** The age distribution of voters polled was fairly even across all groups, with Asian youth 18 to 29 years old and middle aged Asians 40 to 49 years old as the two largest age groups surveyed, 25 % and 20 % respectively. Voters over 60 years old were 19 % of the total respondent pool, in addition to those aged 30 to 39 and 50 to 59, each 18 % respectively. More than 95 % of Asian voters above the age of 40 were foreign born, while over half of the Asian youth (52 %) were native U.S. born.

**Educational Attainment.** 29 % of all respondents had no formal education in the United States. 3 % had less than a high school education, 10 % attained high school or trade school degrees from a U.S. school, 42 % attended college or university in the U.S., and 16 % held advanced graduate degrees.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, 38 % of limited English proficient voters had no formal education in the U.S.

<sup>10</sup> Other surveys, such as the census, often phrase questions on educational attainment without making distinctions between the education completed abroad and the education acquired in the U.S. The percentages presented in this report reflect education attainment only in the U.S.

Figure 4. Ethnicity by Party Affiliation.



**Party Affiliation.** A majority of Asian Americans (57%) were registered Democrats, 15% were registered as Republicans, and only 2% were enrolled in other parties. 26% of all Asian American respondents were not enrolled in any political party.

While Democratic Party enrollment was the choice of each Asian ethnic group, there were some variations. By and large, South Asians, particularly Bangladeshi (84%) and Indo-Caribbean voters (81%), were registered as Democrats. A majority of Southeast Asian voters of Laotian and Cambodian descent were also enrolled as Democrats, 63% and 66% respectively. But nearly half (48%) of the Vietnamese voters who were surveyed were registered as Republicans. The Chinese respondents had the highest percentage among all Asian ethnic groups of those not enrolled in any party (32%).

**First Time Voting.** More than a third (38%) of all those surveyed stated that the November 2004 elections were the first U.S. elections in which they had voted. More than half of the Cambodian (57%), Arab (51%), and Bangladeshi (51%) respondents were first-time voters. 46% of Southeast Asians as a whole were voting for the first time. Among South Asians, there were also many first-time voters (42%), notably among the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities.

Figure 5. First Time Voting.

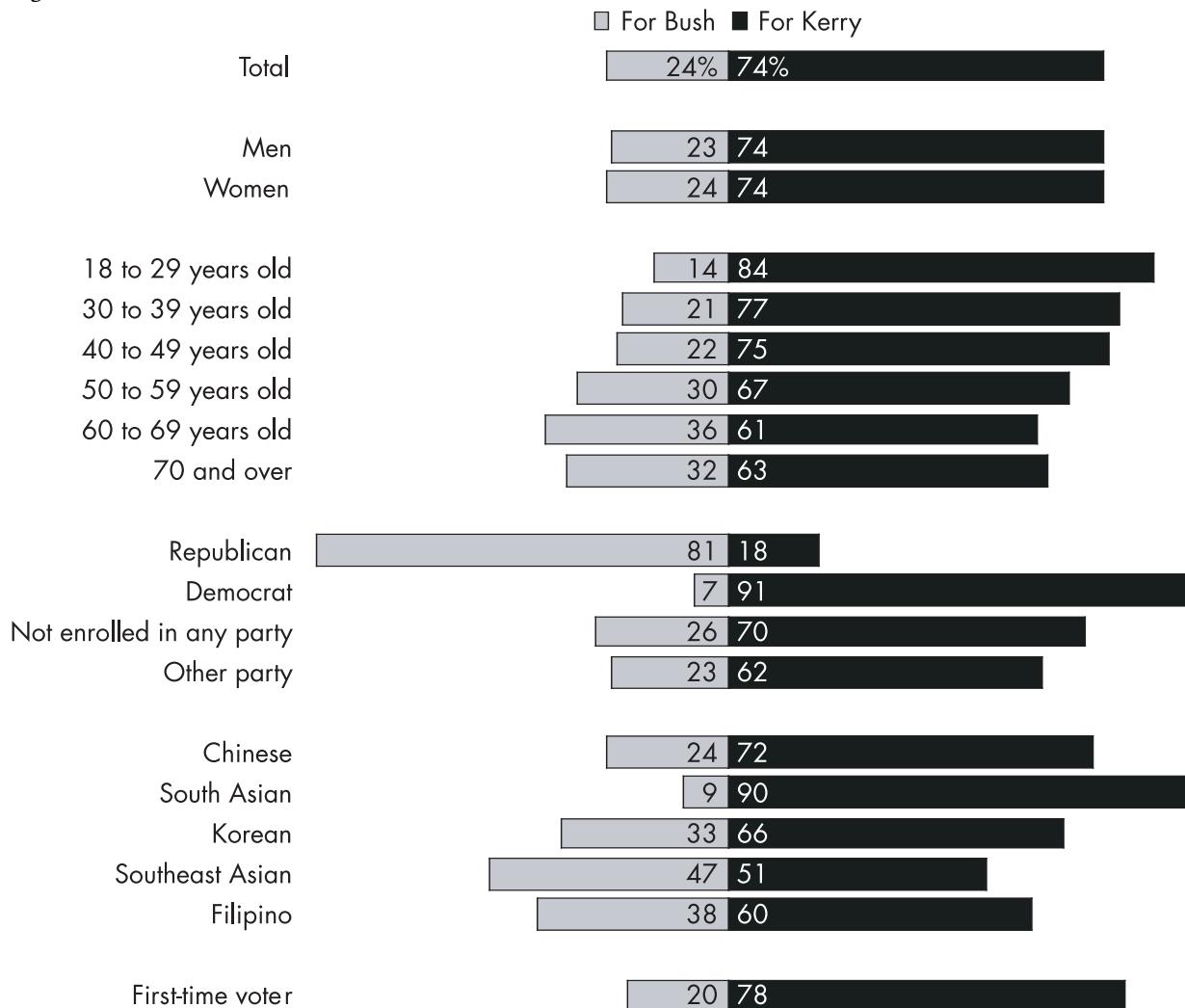
Southeast Asian	46%
South Asian	42%
All respondents	38%
Chinese	37%
Korean	35%
Filipino	27%

## II. Asian Americans and the Presidential Vote

Asian Americans favored Senator John Kerry over President George W. Bush, 74% to 24%, with 2% voting for other candidates. Exit polls conducted by the National Election Pool (ABC, Associated Press, CBS, CNN, Fox and NBC) and the *Los Angeles Times* likewise found that Asian American voters favored Kerry over Bush, but those polls had much smaller samples of Asian American voters.<sup>11</sup>

Among first-time Asian American voters, 78% voted for Kerry, 20% voted for Bush, and 2% voted for other candidates.

Figure 6. Vote for President.



<sup>11</sup> Asians made up only 2% of the total sample in the exit poll conducted by the National Election Pool and 3% of the total sample in the exit poll conducted by the *Los Angeles Times*. These surveys were administered in English and Spanish.

<sup>12</sup> Exit poll data for the National Election Pool was collected by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International. Their national poll sampled 13,660 voters, either exiting the polling place or telephone interviews of absentee/early voters. 77% were White, 11% African Americans, 8% Latino, 2% Asian, and 2% other. More results from this exit poll are available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5297138/>.

Among Asian ethnic groups, South Asians were the strongest supporters for Kerry (90%).

Compared to other racial groups, Asian Americans voted for Presidential candidates at about the same percentage as Latinos, who voted 53% for Kerry and 44% for Bush.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 7. Vote for President by Racial Group.

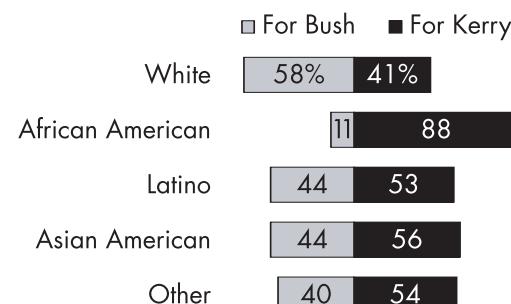
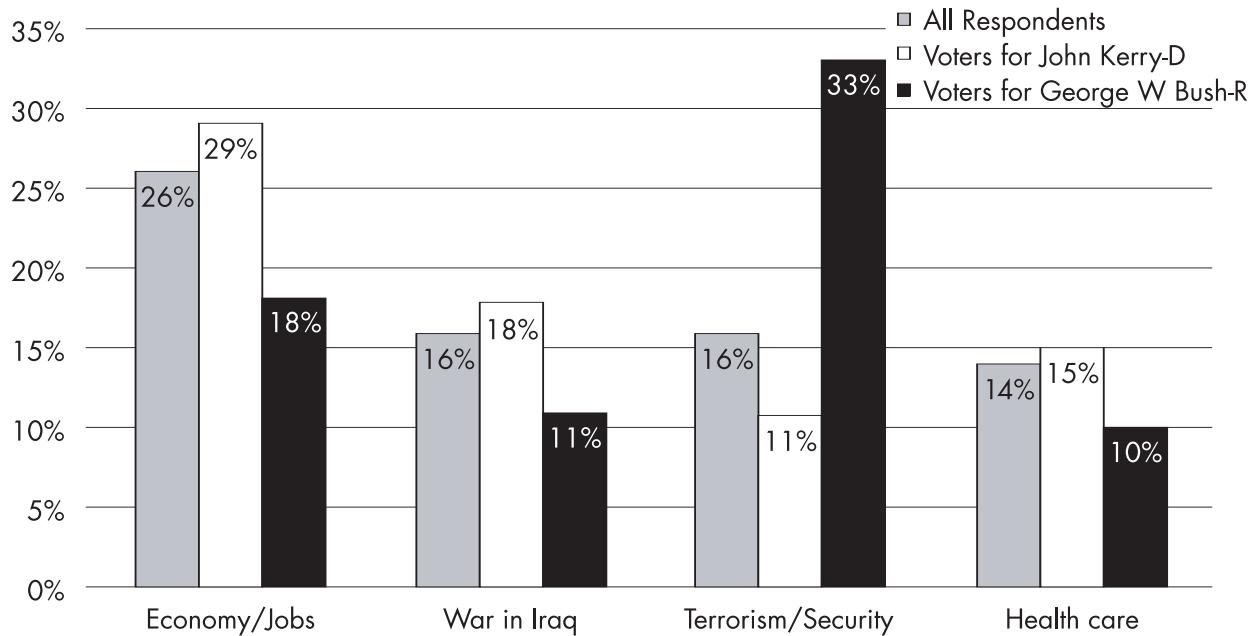


Figure 8. Most Important Factors Influencing Their Vote for President.



### A. Most Important Factor in Vote for President

The most important issues influencing Asian Americans in their vote for president were: Economy/Jobs (26 %); War in Iraq (16 %); Terrorism/Security (16 %); Health Care (14 %); Civil Rights/Immigrant Rights (13 %); Education (8 %); Other (4 %); and Crime in Neighborhoods (3 %). Other issues included the candidate's character, gay rights, reproductive rights, stem cell research and international affairs/foreign policy.

Among Bush supporters, the factors influencing the vote were Terrorism/Security (33 %), Economy/Jobs (18 %), and the War in Iraq (11 %). Among Kerry supporters, the factors influencing the vote were Economy/Jobs (29 %), the War in Iraq (18 %), and Health Care (15 %).

### B. Crossover Voting

In the presidential race, 18 % of all Asian Republicans crossed party lines to vote for Kerry, while only 7 % of Asian Democrats crossed over to vote for Bush. Kerry was also

the choice of Asian American voters who were not enrolled in any political party.

Figure 9. Vote for President by Party Affiliation.

Voted For	Asian Democrats	Asian Republicans	Asians Not Enrolled
Bush	7%	81%	26%
Kerry	91%	18%	70%

Crossover voting for Kerry was stronger among Asian Americans when compared to the nation's voters. The National Election Pool reported that only 6 % of all Republicans voted for Kerry, while 11 % of all Democrats voted for Bush.<sup>13</sup>

South Asian voters showed overwhelming support for Kerry, with more than 32 % of South Asian Republicans crossing party lines to vote for a Democrat. Only 2 % of South Asian Democrats voted for Bush. 1 in 5 Chinese Republicans also crossed party lines to vote for Kerry, while almost 1 voter for every 10 Chinese Democrats voted for Bush.

<sup>13</sup> 37 % of this sample were registered Democrats, 37 % were Republican, and 26 % were Independent.

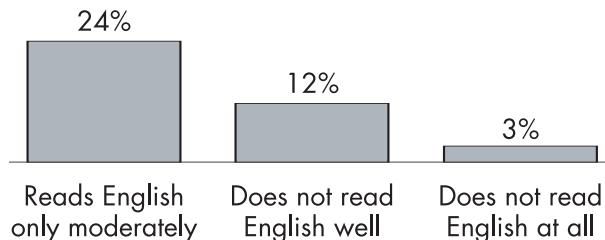
### III. The Vote by Other Characteristics

#### A. First-Time Voters

39% of first-time voters were limited English proficient compared to 41% overall.

Nearly half (46%) of those who used some form of language assistance were first-time voters.

Figure 10. Limited English Proficiency.



57% of first-time voters were Democrats. By contrast, 13% were Republicans and 28% were not enrolled in any party. Only 2% were enrolled in another political party.

Among these new Asian American voters, 78% voted for Kerry, 20% voted for Bush, and 2% voted for other candidates. The most important factors influencing their vote mirrored that of all voters, Economy/Jobs (27%), the War in Iraq (17%), and Terrorism/Security (14%).

#### B. Foreign Born Voters

82% of the Asian Americans surveyed on Election Day were foreign born voters.<sup>14</sup>

Of the survey respondents who were native born, 45% voted for the first time. By contrast, 86% of those who became U.S. citizens in the last 2 years voted for the first time. Close to half (49%) of the Asian Americans who became U.S. citizens 3 to 5 years ago were also new voters.

Over half (52%) of the foreign born voters who became U.S. citizens in the last 5 years were limited English proficient. However, Asian Americans who had been naturalized 6-10 years or more than 10 years also expressed difficulty with English, 47% and 48% respectively.

Figure 11. Citizenship Tenure by First Time Voting.

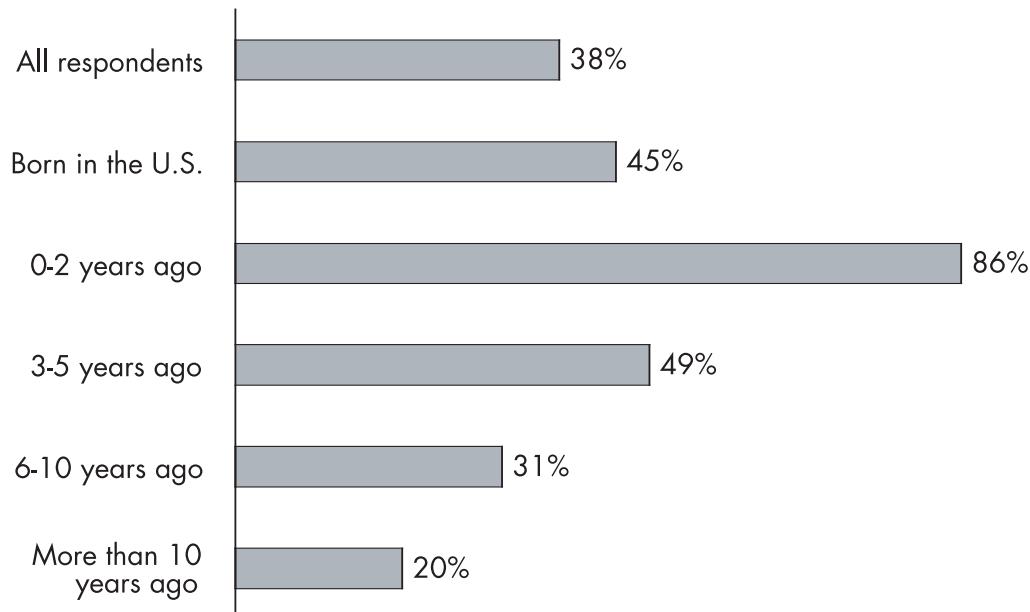
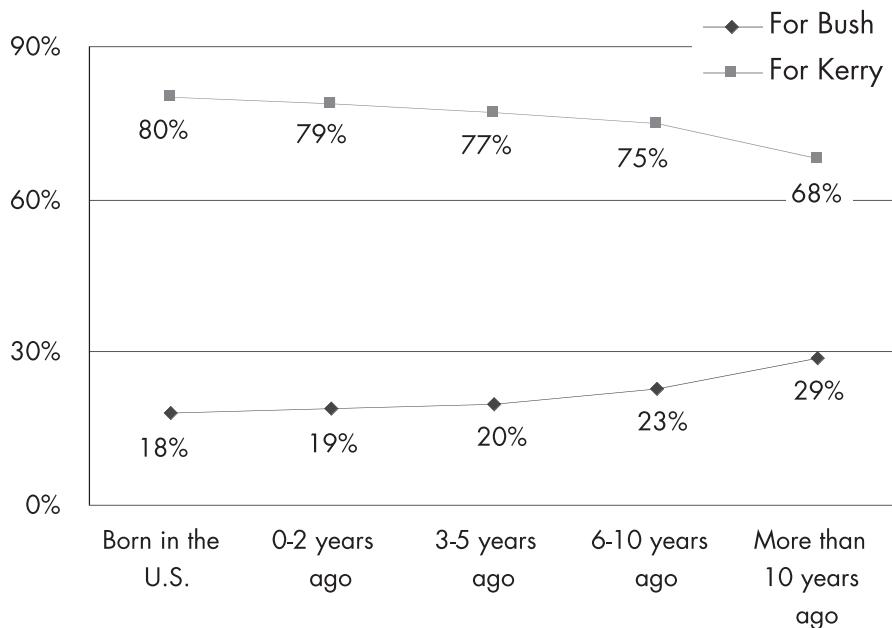


Figure 12. Citizenship Tenure by Vote for President.



There was an inverse relationship between the vote for the presidential candidates and the citizenship tenure of Asian American voters. Kerry's greatest support came from U.S. born Asian Americans and Asian Americans who became citizens within five years of the election. Conversely, Bush's greatest support came from those who had been naturalized for more than 10 years.

Foreign born voters, regardless of when they naturalized, identified Economy/Jobs as the most important factor influencing their vote for president. However, they were more likely to rank Civil Rights or Health Care as motivating factors influencing their vote than U.S. born voters, who ranked the War in Iraq second and Terrorism/Security third.

### C. Young Voters

Close to half (48 %) of Asian Americans aged 18 to 29 years old were foreign born. 63 % of them voted for the first time.

Across all age groups, young people favored Kerry the most, with 84 % voting for Kerry, 14 % voting for Bush and 2 % for other candidates. Though 9 % of these Asian youth were registered in the Republican Party, 25 % of them crossed party lines to vote for Kerry. By contrast, 4 % of young Democrats voted for Bush.



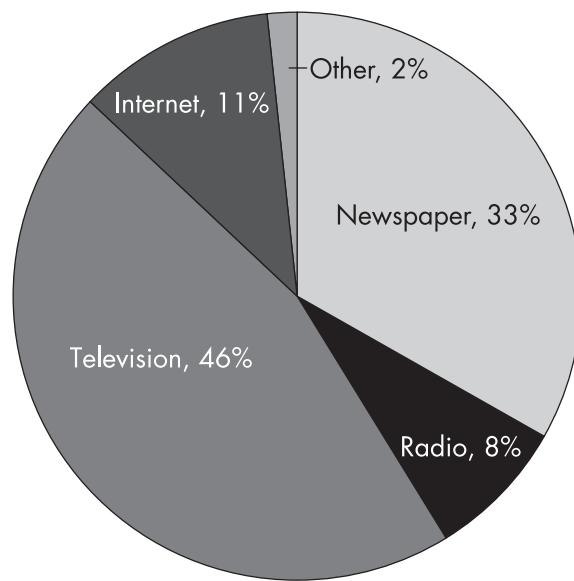
Photo by Jenjamin Yuh

## IV. News Sources and Civil Rights Issues

### A. Source of News

Nearly 46 % of Asians responded that they watched television as their main source of news about politics and community issues. Another third (33 %) said that their main source of news came from the newspaper, 11 % got their information from the Internet, 8 % from the radio, and 2 % from other sources.

Figure 13. Source of News.



More than half (51 %) of all respondents got their news from the ethnic press, rather than from mainstream English media outlets.

The ethnic newspaper was the most common source (43 %) among those using ethnic sources. Very few (6 %), however, used the Internet, as opposed to the 19 % of those using mainstream English news sources.

Korean and Chinese voters received their news about politics and community issues primarily from ethnic media outlets, most of which were translated in Asian languages.

Figure 14. Type of Media.

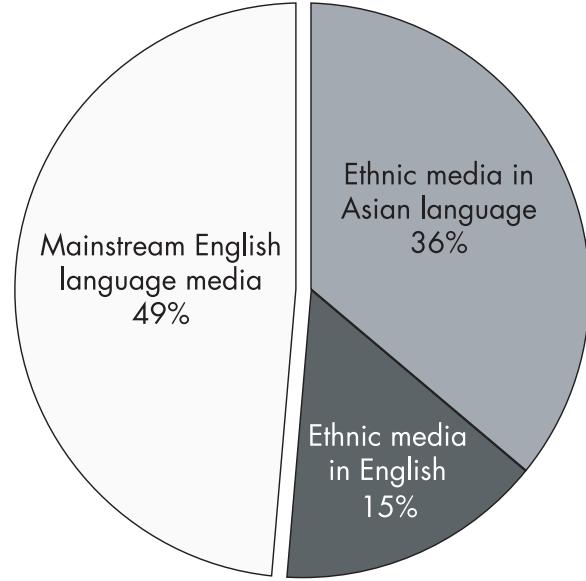


Figure 15. Ethnicity by Type of Media.

	Ethnic media in Asian language	Ethnic media in English	Mainstream English language media
Chinese	47%	12%	41%
South Asian	16%	22%	62%
Korean	57%	9%	34%
Southeast Asian	26%	22%	52%
Filipino	6%	16%	78%

## B. Immigrant Rights/Civil Rights Issues

When asked what immigrant rights/civil rights issue was most important to them, Asian Americans overwhelmingly chose Civil Liberties as their top issue. This issue was followed by Affirmative Action, Racial Profiling and Workers' Rights. Each Asian ethnic group shared similar issues of importance, although there was some variation in their second and third issues.

Among first-time voters, the most important issues included Civil Liberties (28 %), Workers' Rights (10 %) and Racial Profiling (10 %). Likewise, foreign born Asians responded with Civil Liberties (29 %) as their top immigrant rights issue, followed by Affirmative Action (10 %) and Racial Profiling (10 %).

Figure 16. Most Important Civil Rights Issue.

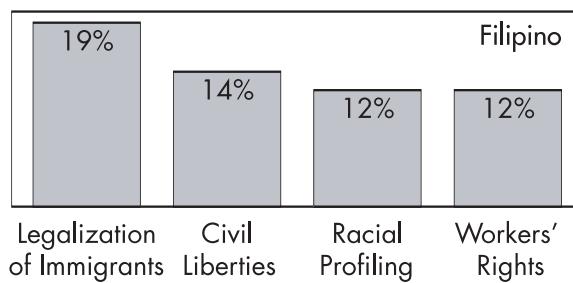
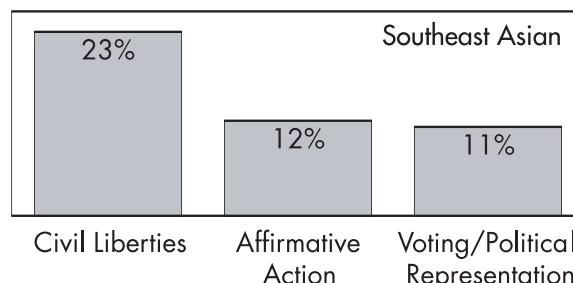
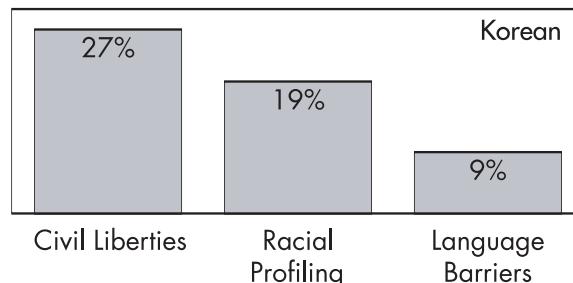
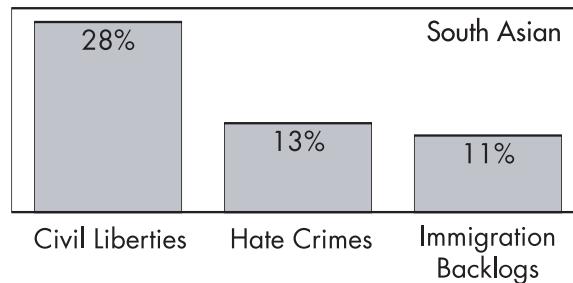
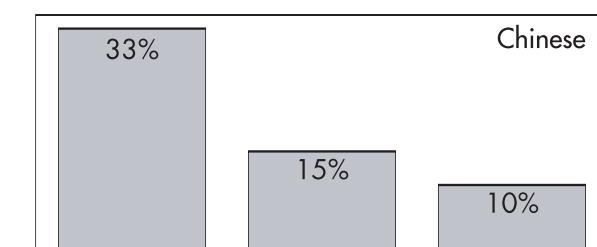
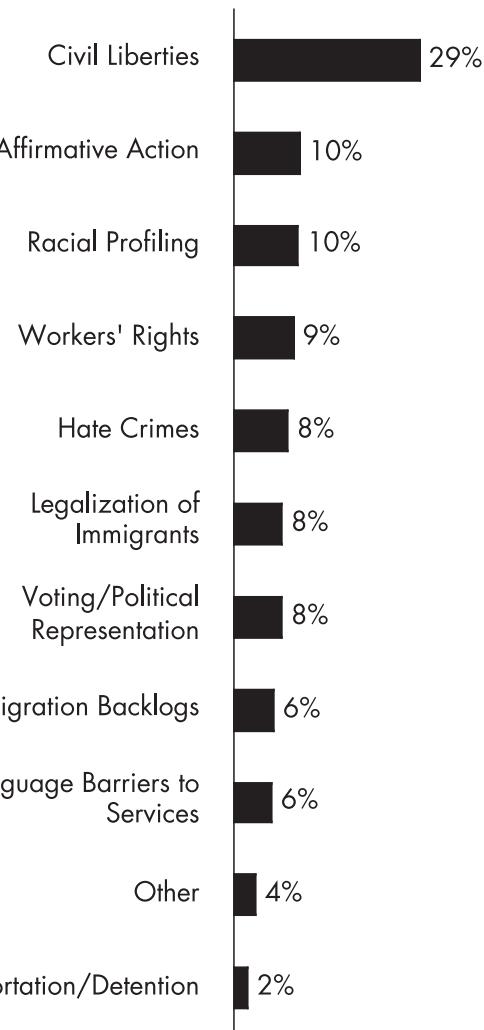


Photo by Joseph Hsu, *World Journal*

## V. Access to the Vote

The federal Voting Rights Act protects racial, ethnic and language minority voters. Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act guards against racial discrimination. Section 203 affirmatively requires jurisdictions with large numbers of limited English proficient voting age citizens to provide translated ballots and interpreters at poll sites. Congress also enacted the federal Help American Vote Act (HAVA) to remedy many voting problems highlighted in Florida in the 2000 elections. Several state laws and local election procedures also protect Asian American and other minority voters.

### A. Language Assistance

The 2004 exit poll covered jurisdictions that were either legally required to provide or voluntarily provided language assistance to the vote.

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act covers jurisdictions in New York and Illinois for Asian language assistance.<sup>15</sup> In New York, Chinese language assistance is required in Kings County (Brooklyn) and New York County (Manhattan), and both Chinese and Korean are required in Queens County. In Illinois, Cook County is covered for Chinese language assistance. These jurisdictions must provide translated ballots, instructions, and other voting materials and interpreters at poll sites with large numbers of limited English proficient voters.

In Michigan, pursuant to a consent decree by the U. S. Department of Justice for past voting discrimination and racial profiling at the polls in violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, the City of Hamtramck provided Arabic and Bengali language assistance.<sup>16</sup>

Other jurisdictions in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois and Pennsylvania voluntarily provide language assistance, most often in the form of interpreters at selected poll sites for particular Asian language minority voters.

Figure 17. Required Language Assistance by Language Minority Group.

Language Minority Group <sup>17</sup>	Limited English Proficient	Needed an Interpreter	Needed Translated Written Materials
Chinese in Manhattan, Brooklyn, & Queens, NY	56%	37%	36%
Korean in Queens, NY	67%	34%	49%
Bangladeshi in Hamtramck, MI	59%	26%	33%
Arab in Hamtramck, MI	38%	30%	24%

<sup>15</sup> A political subdivision is covered if more than 5 % or 10,000 of its voting age citizens are members of a single language minority group and are limited English proficient, and the illiteracy rate of such language minority citizens is higher than the national illiteracy rate. A complete list of the 296 jurisdictions that are required to provide minority language assistance can be found at [http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/sec\\_203/203\\_notice.pdf](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/sec_203/203_notice.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> *U.S. v. City of Hamtramck*, (E.D.Mich.) Aug. 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Chinese voters were not surveyed at Section 203 covered poll sites in Chicago, Illinois. Consequently, the corresponding numbers for limited English proficiency and use of language assistance are not offered in this report.

Figure 18. Voluntary Language Assistance by Language Minority Group.

Language Minority Group	Limited English Proficient	Needed an Interpreter	Needed Translated Written Materials
Korean in Palisades Park & Fort Lee, NJ	55%	21%	33%
Chinese in Boston, MA	65%	43%	52%
Vietnamese in Dorchester, MA	74%	60%	55%
Cambodian in Lowell, MA	39%	35%	32%
Korean in Greater Chicago Area, IL	59%	22%	37%
Chinese in Philadelphia, PA	44%	25%	31%
Vietnamese in Falls Church, VA	55%	29%	24%

All voters have a right to be assisted by a person of their choice, and these individuals (most often a friend or family member) may enter voting booths to translate the ballot for the voter. In jurisdictions where Asian American voters were growing in numbers but language assistance was not already provided, voters were allowed to bring their own interpreters. This particularly involved Southeast Asian voters (Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese) in Providence, RI; Chinese voters in Quincy, MA; South Asians in Edison and Jersey City, NJ; and South Asian and Vietnamese voters in Falls Church, VA.

Language assistance has expanded access to the vote for many Asian Americans. The greatest beneficiaries of language assistance (46%) were first-time voters.

## B. Voting Barriers

Asian Americans had to overcome a number of barriers to exercise their right to vote. For example, in most jurisdictions identification was not a prerequisite to voting. HAVA now requires that certain first-time voters must provide identification.<sup>18</sup> Other voters were generally exempt from these new federal

voting requirements. However, two thirds (66%) of New York and New Jersey voters who had registered prior to January 1, 2003 were required to show identification, even though it was not legally required under HAVA. In total, 2,789 voters reported that they were required to show some form of identification.

A number of Asian American voters polled also reported various other voting problems.

- The names of 371 voters were not on the lists of registered voters.
- 126 voters complained that poll workers were discourteous or hostile.
- 239 voters said that poll workers were poorly trained.
- 185 voters were directed to the wrong poll site or election district.
- 385 voters encountered other voting problems.

More than 600 voters called AALDEF's election hotline or complained to poll monitors to report voting problems. More must be done to ensure that Asian Americans can fully exercise their right to vote.

<sup>18</sup> HAVA's identification provisions only apply to first time voters who registered after January 1, 2003, registered by mail, and who did not provide a driver's license number or last four digits of social security numbers or the numbers did not match.

## APPENDIX

### **A. Poll Site Locations**

#### **New York**

Manhattan (Chinatown, Lower East Side)  
 Queens (Flushing, Jackson Heights,  
 Elmhurst, Richmond Hill, Floral Park,  
 Jamaica, Bayside)  
 Brooklyn (Sunset Park, Williamsburg,  
 Midwood, Kensington)

#### **New Jersey**

Palisades Park  
 Fort Lee  
 Jersey City  
 Edison  
 East Brunswick

#### **Massachusetts**

Boston (Chinatown, Dorchester, Mission Hill)  
 Lowell  
 Quincy

#### **Rhode Island**

Providence

#### **Michigan**

Detroit  
 Hamtramck  
 Dearborn  
 Ann Arbor

#### **Illinois**

Chicago (Nortown, Devon, Albany Park)  
 Evanston  
 Lincolnwood  
 Glenview  
 North Brook

#### **Pennsylvania**

Philadelphia (Chinatown, North Philadelphia)

#### **Virginia**

Annandale  
 Falls Church  
 Arlington

### **B. Co-Sponsors of the Asian American Exit Poll**

Asian American Bar Association of New York  
 Asian Pacific American Agenda Coalition  
 Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center  
 Boston Asian Students Alliance  
 Chinatown Voter Education Alliance  
 Chinese Progressive Association  
 Harry H. Dow Memorial Legal Assistance Fund  
 Korean American Resource and Cultural Center  
 Korean American Voters Council of NY/NJ  
 Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights – Boston  
 National Asian American Student Convention  
 National Korean American Service and Education Consortium  
 Providence Youth and Student Movement  
 Organization of Chinese Americans – Detroit Chapter  
 South Asian American Leaders for Tomorrow  
 South Asian American Voting Youth  
 Vietnamese American Initiative for Development  
 Young Korean American Service and Education Center

## C. Acknowledgments

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Asian American Studies Program, Hunter College/ City University of New York (CUNY)  
 Asian/American Center, Queens College/ City University of New York (CUNY)  
 Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program & Institute, New York University  
 Center for the Study of Race & Ethnicity, Columbia University  
 College of Public and Community Service, University of Massachusetts at Boston  
 Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University

### *Asian Pacific American Law Student Associations (APALSA)*

Brooklyn Law School  
 Cardozo School of Law  
 Columbia Law School<sup>18</sup>  
 CUNY School of Law at Queens College  
 Fordham University School of Law  
 Harvard Law School  
 Hofstra University School of Law  
 New York University School of Law<sup>19</sup>  
 Northeastern University School of Law  
 Rutgers University School of Law  
 Suffolk University Law School  
 Southern New England School of Law  
 University of Chicago Law School  
 University of Michigan School of Law

### *Community-Based Organizations*

Asian Pacific Islander American Corporate Leadership Network  
 Asian Americans Raise Your Voice  
 Coalition of Asian, African, European and Latino Immigrants of Illinois  
 Collaborative Opportunities for Raising Awareness  
 Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York  
 Korean American League for Civic Action  
 Project Impact for South Asian Americans  
 South Asian Youth Action!  
 Young Korean American Network

### *Undergraduate Student Clubs and Organizations*

ACLU Chapter at University of Chicago  
 Arab Student Association at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor  
 Asian American Alliance at Columbia University  
 Asian American Students Association at Brown University  
 Asian American Women's Alliance at New York University  
 United Asian American Organizations at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor

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<sup>18</sup> At Columbia and NYU, both the APALSA and South Asian American Law Student Association assisted in the exit poll.



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# THE ASIAN AMERICAN VOTE IN THE 2006 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

NY, NJ, MA, MI, PA, MD, VA, IL, WA, DC

A REPORT OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Election Day, November 7, 2006, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), with the help of several co-sponsoring organizations and more than 600 attorneys, law students, and volunteers, conducted a nonpartisan, multilingual exit poll of over 4,700 Asian American voters. The questionnaire was available in English and nine Asian languages. Voters were surveyed in 23 cities across nine states—New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Illinois, Washington—as well as Washington, D.C. AALDEF has coordinated exit polls in every major election since 1988.<sup>1</sup>

Multilingual exit polls give a fuller and more accurate portrait of Asian American voters than polls conducted only in English. AALDEF's exit poll often finds different results than mainstream exit polls and reveals more detailed characteristics about the Asian American community.

The five largest groups surveyed in 2006 were Chinese (38%), South Asian (27%), Korean (14%), Southeast Asian (8%), and Filipino (7%).<sup>2</sup> Approximately four out of five (83%) respondents were foreign born. Twenty-nine percent (29%) had no formal education in the U.S. Thirteen percent (13%) were voting for the first time.

***Asian Americans shared common political interests, even across ethnic lines.***

Though Asian Americans are diverse, coming from different countries and speaking different languages and dialects, in the political arena they exhibit political unity. During the midterm elections, each Asian ethnic group voted as a bloc for the same top-ballot candidates. Every ethnic group selected Economy/Jobs as the most important issue for the 2008 Presidential candidates to address. On questions of immigration, nearly every major ethnic group shared similar opinions on specific immigration reform issues.

***For Asian Americans, Economy/Jobs was the most important issue to be addressed by 2008 Presidential candidates.***

Overall, the most important issues that Asian Americans wanted the 2008 Presidential candidates to address were Economy/Jobs (28%), followed by Health Care (19%), the War in Iraq (15%), and Education (15%). Other issues identified by Asian American voters included Immigration (9%), Terrorism/Security (9%), and Moral Issues (4%).

***Asian Americans were largely Democratic voters.***

Four out of every five (80%) Asian American voters supported the Democratic candidates in the top-ballot races for their respective states.<sup>3</sup> In all but one of those races, the Democratic candidates emerged victorious with the overwhelming support of the Asian American vote. Most notably, in the Virginia Senate race, three out of four Asian Americans (76%) voted for Democrat Jim Webb, who unseated Republican incumbent George Allen by 0.3% of the total vote. Webb's victory gave the Democrats a majority in the Senate.

***Party crossover voting heavily favored Democrats.***

Significantly more Asian American Republicans crossed party lines to vote for Democratic candidates than did Asian American Democrats voting for Republican candidates. Moreover, the majority of Asian Americans not enrolled in a party threw their support to the Democrats.

***Asian Americans supported legalization of undocumented immigrants and reducing immigration backlogs, while they opposed making being undocumented a crime.***

Of those who expressed an opinion, 75% of Asian Americans said they supported creating a way for undocumented immigrants to gain legal status. Nearly nine out of ten (89%) respondents said they favored reducing the amount of time the government takes to process paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country. Seventy-two percent (72%) of Asian Americans opposed making being undocumented a crime.

***Language assistance and bilingual ballots are needed to preserve access to the vote.***

Forty-three percent (43%) of Asian Americans expressed that they were limited English proficient, and 13% identified English as their native language. A number of poll sites were mandated to provide bilingual ballots and interpreters under the federal Voting Rights Act; other jurisdictions voluntarily provided language assistance. In the 2006 elections, nearly half of all voters surveyed (46%) needed interpreters to vote, and 38% used translated written materials. The greatest beneficiaries of language assistance were first-time voters, 47% of whom were limited English proficient.

***Asian Americans faced many voting barriers.***

AALDEF poll monitors and pollsters received more than 200 complaints of voting problems. Asian American voters were unlawfully required to provide identification to vote, mistreated by hostile, rude or poorly trained poll workers, directed to the wrong poll sites, and did not receive adequate notification of their poll site assignments.

Copies of this report can be obtained online at [www.aaldef.org](http://www.aaldef.org) or by contacting the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund at 212.966.5932 or [info@aaldef.org](mailto:info@aaldef.org).

## Methodology

In November 2006, 593 volunteers, along with AALDEF staff and interns, surveyed 4,726 Asian American voters at 68 poll sites in 23 cities across nine states—New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Illinois, Washington—and Washington, D.C.

The states selected for the exit poll were among those with the largest Asian American populations in the nation. Cities and poll sites with large concentrations of Asian American voters were selected based on interviews with local elections officials and community leaders. Sites with a history of voting problems were also selected.

It is important to note that jurisdictions covered by the exit poll had large Asian American communities according to the U.S. Census. While Asian Americans constitute 4.3% of the total U.S. population, they comprise:

- 12% of New York City,
- 7% of New Jersey,
- 9% of Boston, MA,
- 17% of Quincy, MA,
- 21% of Lowell, MA,
- 5% of Philadelphia, PA,
- 7% of Upper Darby, PA,
- 15% of Ann Arbor, MI,
- 10% of Hamtramck, MI,
- 15% of Rockville, MD,
- 9% of Silver Spring, MD,
- 14% of Seattle, WA,
- 5% of Chicago, IL,
- 19% of Annandale, VA, and
- 3% of the District of Columbia.<sup>4</sup>

Volunteer exit pollsters were stationed at poll sites throughout the day, usually 7:00AM to 8:00PM. Volunteers were recruited by the co-sponsoring organizations, Asian Pacific American Law Student Association chapters, community-based organizations, law firms, and undergraduate associations and classes. All volunteers were trained in conducting the exit poll. All were nonpartisan. Volunteers were instructed to approach all Asian voters as they were leaving poll sites to ask them to complete an anonymous questionnaire.<sup>5</sup>

4,726 surveys were collected. Survey questionnaires were written in nine Asian languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujurati, Khmer, Korean, Punjabi, Urdu, and Vietnamese, in addition to English. Volunteers were conversant in 27 Asian languages and dialects: South Asian

languages (Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Konkani, Malayalam, Nepali, Punjabi, Tamil, Telegu, Urdu), Southeast Asian languages (Indonesian, Khmer, Lao, Thai, Vietnamese), Chinese dialects (Cantonese, Mandarin, Shanghainese, Taiwanese, Toisan), Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Japanese, Tagalog, and Tongan. One in three respondents (35%) completed Asian language questionnaires, while 65% completed the English version. Some voters needed assistance and had the questionnaires read aloud to them.

## I. Profile of Survey Respondents

### Ethnicity

Survey respondents were predominantly Chinese (38%), South Asian (27%), Korean (14%), Southeast Asian (8%), Filipino (7%), and West Asian (3%). South Asian includes Asian Indians, Bangladeshis, Indo-Caribbeans<sup>6</sup>, Pakistanis, and Sri Lankans. Southeast Asian includes Cambodians, Laotians, Thais, and Vietnamese. West Asian includes Arabs, Lebanese, and Yemeni.<sup>7</sup> The remaining respondents were of other Asian ethnicities and multiracial Asians.

### Language

While 13% of respondents identified English as their native language, 32% identified one or more Chinese dialects as their native language (including Cantonese, Mandarin, etc.), 23% spoke one or more South Asian languages (including Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali, Punjabi, etc.), 12% spoke Korean, 7% spoke one or more Southeast Asian languages (including Vietnamese, Khmer, Lao, etc.), 5% spoke Tagalog, 3% spoke Arabic, and 2% identified some other Asian language as their native language.

Among Chinese voters, 45% selected Cantonese as their native dialect, and 32% chose Mandarin. Eleven percent (11%) said they spoke multiple Chinese dialects and/or other Chinese dialects, including Fujianese, Hakka, Shanghainese, Taiwanese, and Toisan. Twelve percent (12%) identified English as their native language.

Among Korean voters, 87% selected Korean as their native language, while 12% identified English as their native language.

Percentage of Voters	Asian American respondents
100%	4,726 Total Surveyed
48	Women
52	Men
38	Chinese
27	South Asian
14	Korean
8	Southeast Asian
7	Filipino
6	Other Asian
19	18 to 29 years old
17	30 to 39 years old
16.5	40 to 49 years old
20	50 to 59 years old
14	60 to 69 years old
13.5	70 and over
17	Born in the U.S.
83	Foreign born, naturalized citizen:
... 8	..... 0-2 years ago
... 12	..... 3-5 years ago
... 20	..... 6-10 years ago
... 43	..... More than 10 years ago
29	No formal education in the U.S.
	Educated in the U.S., highest level:
2	..... Elementary school
2	..... Less than high school
8	..... High school degree or equivalent
3	..... Trade school degree
36	..... College or university degree
20	..... Advanced degree

Among South Asian voters, 22% selected Bengali as their native language, 16% selected Gujarati, 15% selected Urdu, 9% selected Hindi, and 6% selected Punjabi. Meanwhile, 19% of South Asian voters spoke multiple South Asian languages and/or other South Asian languages, including Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, and Marathi. Twelve percent (12%) identified English as their native language.

Among Southeast Asian voters, 64% selected Vietnamese as their native language, 17% selected Khmer, and 4% selected English. Another 13% spoke multiple languages and/or other Southeast Asian languages, including Thai, Lao, Indonesian, and Burmese.

Among Filipino voters, 82% selected Tagalog as their native dialect. Sixteen percent (16%) selected English as their native language, and 2% spoke other Filipino dialects.



Photo by Benjamin Yuh

### **Limited English Proficiency**

Forty-three percent (43%) of Asian voters surveyed said they read English less than “very well.” According to the U.S. Census, reading less than “very well” constitutes “limited English proficiency.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, over two-fifths of respondents were limited English proficient. Furthermore, almost half (47%) of all first-time voters were limited English proficient.

Of all ethnic groups, Korean voters exhibited the highest rate of limited English proficiency, with 69% indicating that they have at least some difficulty reading English. Similarly, 55% of Southeast Asian voters and 54% of Chinese voters expressed at least some difficulty reading English. Among South Asians, although Asian Indian voters were largely proficient in English, 40% of Bangladeshi voters and 34% of Pakistani voters read English less than “very well.”

In certain neighborhoods, even higher rates of limited English proficiency were revealed. In the Boston area, 63% of Chinatown respondents were limited English proficient, and 80% of Vietnamese voters in Dorchester were limited English proficient. In Chicago, 88% of Korean respondents expressed difficulty reading English.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they preferred voting with the help of an interpreter or translated voting materials. Yet, 46% actually used an interpreter, either provided by the city or brought by the voter, to help them vote. Thirty-eight percent (38%) used translated voting materials.

The three groups with the highest rates of limited English proficiency also exhibited high propensity towards the use of an interpreter or translated voting materials. Over a third (35%) of Korean voters, 34% of Chinese voters, and 31% of Southeast Asian voters said that they preferred some form of language assistance while voting.

### **Foreign Born**

Eighty-three percent (83%) of all respondents were foreign born naturalized citizens. Eight percent (8%) of voters surveyed became U.S. citizens within the last two years, 12% three to five years ago, 20% six to ten years ago, and 43% more than ten years ago. The groups with the highest rates of foreign born naturalized citizens were Southeast Asians (91%) and Koreans (89%). The groups with the most native born citizens were Chinese (20%) and Asian Indians (17%). Almost all respondents over the age of 40 were foreign born naturalized citizens, while a majority (53%) of those under 30 were native born citizens.

### **Age**

The age distribution of voters polled was fairly even across all groups. Asians 50 to 59 years old and Asian youth 18 to 29 years old were the two largest age groups surveyed at 20% and 19% respectively. Voters 30 to 39 years old and age 40 to 49 years old comprised the third and fourth largest groups at 17% and 16.5% respectively. Fourteen percent (14%) of voters were between the ages 60 and 69, and 13.5% were over the age of 70.

### **Gender**

Out of those surveyed, 52% were male and 48% were female. There was some variation of this gender ratio among specific ethnic groups. Among South Asians, 61% were male and 39% were female. However, among Filipinos, Koreans, and Chinese, the majority of respondents were female. Sixty-five percent (65%) of Filipino respondents, 54% of Koreans, and 52% of Chinese were female.

### **Educational Attainment**

Over a quarter (29%) of all respondents had no formal education in the United States. Four percent (4%) had less than a high school education, 11% attained high school or trade school degrees from a U.S. school, 36% attended college or university in the U.S., and 20% held advanced graduate degrees. Some ethnic groups had even lower rates of formal U.S. education. Over half (56%) of Korean respondents and 30% of Chinese respondents had no formal education in the U.S.

### **First Time Voting**

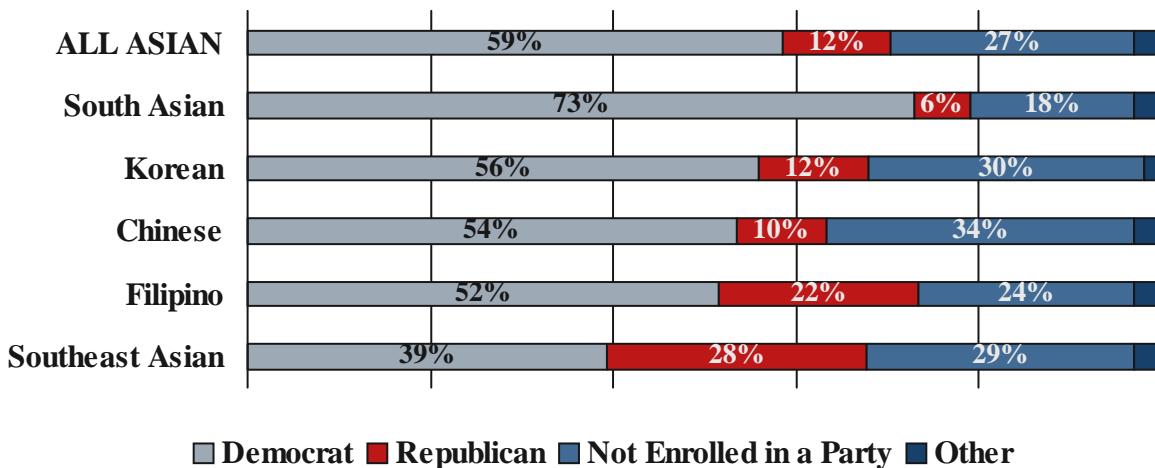
Thirteen percent (13%) of those surveyed stated that they voted for the first time in the November 2006 elections. The groups with the highest rates of first-time voters were Cambodians (25%), Pakistanis (24%), and Bangladeshis (18%). In comparison,

South Asian	17%
Southeast Asian	15%
ALL ASIANS	13%
Chinese	11%
Filipino	10%
Korean	10%

AALDEF's exit poll of the November 2004 elections showed that 38% of all Asian Americans surveyed were voting for the first time, and that more than half of all Cambodian, Arab, and Bangladeshi respondents were first-time voters.

### **Party Affiliation**

A majority of Asian Americans surveyed (59%) were registered Democrats, 12% were registered Republicans, and 3% were enrolled in other parties. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of all Asian American respondents were not enrolled in any political party.



Even though Asian Americans tended to be registered Democrats, the exit poll revealed some variations across ethnic lines. South Asian voters were enrolled in the Democratic Party at higher rates than all other Asian ethnic groups. Overall, 73% of South Asians were registered Democrats, including 70% of Asian Indians, 72% of Pakistanis, 80% of Bangladeshis, and 80% of Indo-Caribbeans.

Conversely, Southeast Asians had much lower rates of enrollment in the Democratic Party with 39% registered Democrats, 28% registered Republican, and 29% not enrolled in any party. Moreover, 31% of Vietnamese voters were registered Democrats, 33% were registered Republicans, and 32% were not enrolled.

Filipino voters also exhibited higher rates of Republican Party enrollment with 22% registered Republicans. More than half (52%) of all Filipino respondents were registered Democrats and 24% were not enrolled in any party.

## II. The Asian American Vote

In the November 2006 midterm elections, Democrats seized control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 12 years. They won a majority in the Senate with 51 of 100 seats,<sup>9</sup> and a majority in the House of Representatives with 233 of 435 seats.<sup>10</sup>

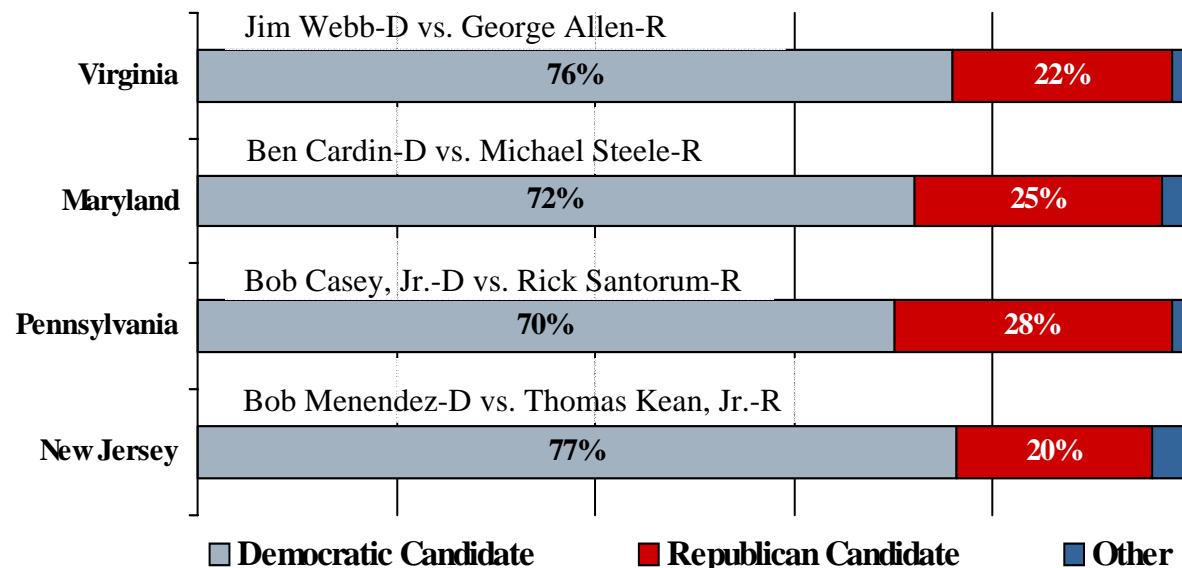
In the midst of this historical shift in power, Asian American voters heavily favored Democratic candidates in key races. Four out of every five (80%) Asian Americans voted for the Democratic candidates in the top-ballot races, and 17% voted for the Republican candidates. Asian Americans also demonstrated robust support for Democratic candidates in other state races for Governor and Attorney General.

Additionally, Asian Americans took a firm stance in supporting affirmative action in Michigan by voting against Proposal 2. Despite the myth that affirmative action policies put Asian Americans at a disadvantage relative to other racial minority groups, Asian Americans voted in a bloc to continue those policies.

### U.S. Senate Races

In the *New Jersey Senate race*, 77% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic incumbent Sen. Bob Menendez, while 20% voted for Republican challenger Thomas Kean, Jr. Among all New Jersey voters, Menendez retained his seat by an 8-point margin (53% to 45%).<sup>11</sup>

In the *Pennsylvania Senate race*, 70% of Asian Americans supported Democratic candidate Bob Casey, Jr., while 28% voted for incumbent Republican Sen. Rick Santorum. Among the general electorate, Casey carried 59% of the total vote and Santorum held 41%.<sup>12</sup>



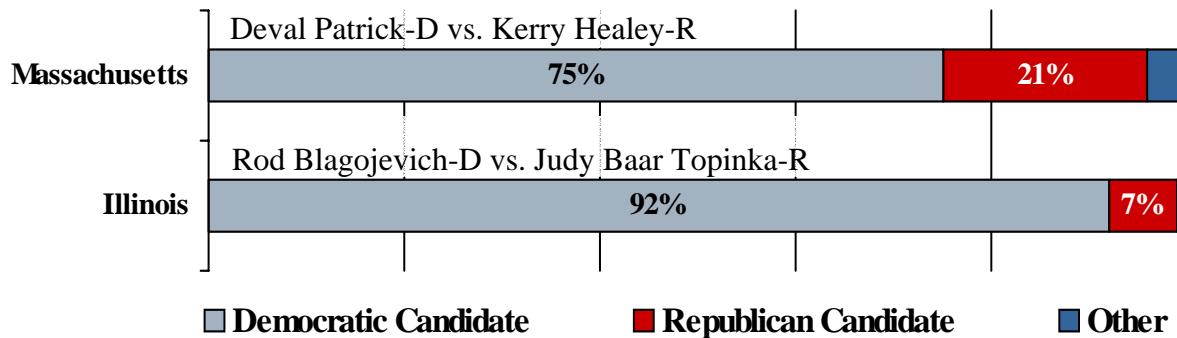
In the *Virginia Senate race*, 76% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic challenger Jim Webb, while 22% voted for Republican incumbent Sen. George Allen. Among all Virginia voters, Webb defeated Allen by less than 8,000 votes, a 0.3% margin of victory.<sup>13</sup>

In the *Maryland Senate race*, 72% of Asian Americans voted for Democrat Ben Cardin to fill the open Senate seat, while 25% voted for Republican Michael Steele. Among the general electorate, 54% voted Cardin and 44% voted for Steele.<sup>14</sup>

### Governor Races

In the *Massachusetts Gubernatorial race*, 75% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic candidate Deval Patrick, while 21% voted for Republican candidate Kerry Healey. Additionally, although most Vietnamese American respondents were not registered Democrats, a majority (53%) of Vietnamese Americans voted for Patrick. Among all voters, Patrick defeated Healey 56% to 35% and became the first African American governor of Massachusetts and the second elected in U.S. history.<sup>16</sup>

In the *Illinois Gubernatorial race*, 92% of Asian Americans supported Democratic incumbent Gov. Rod Blagojevich, while 7% supported Republican challenger Judy Baar Topinka. Among the general electorate, Gov. Blagojevich retained the governorship by a 10-point margin (50% to 40%).<sup>15</sup>



### Illinois U.S. House of Representatives Races

In the race for the *Illinois 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District*, 80% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic candidate Tammy Duckworth, an Asian American, while 20% voted for Republican candidate Peter Roskam. In the general electorate, Roskam won the open seat by less than 5,000 votes, a 2-point margin.<sup>17</sup>

### New York Attorney General's Race

In the *New York State Attorney General's race*, 82% of Asian Americans voted for Democratic candidate Andrew Cuomo, while 14% voted for Republican contender Jeanine Pirro and 4% voted for other candidates. Among all voters, 57% voted for Cuomo and 40%

voted for Pirro.<sup>18</sup>

### **Affirmative Action**

In Michigan, 77% of Asian American voters voted “No” to Proposal 2, which sought to end race- and gender-based affirmative action programs in education, hiring, contracting, and health initiatives. Similarly, according to the National Election Pool (NEP), 86% of African American voters also voted “No” on Proposal 2. However, the NEP exit polls did not have significant numbers of Asian or Latino respondents in Michigan and did not report how those communities voted.<sup>19</sup> Among all Michigan voters, 58% approved of the ban on affirmative action and 42% voted “No.”<sup>20</sup> According to the NEP, 64% of all white voters voted “Yes” to Proposal 2.<sup>21</sup>

### **Crossover Voting**

Party crossover voting largely benefited Democratic candidates. In some races, significantly more Asian Republicans broke party lines to vote for Democratic candidates. Additionally, most Asian Americans not enrolled in any party gave their support to the Democratic candidates as well.

In the New Jersey Senate race, 4% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Thomas Kean, Jr. Meanwhile, 18% of Asian Republicans and 70% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Bob Menendez.

In the Pennsylvania Senate race, 7% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Rick Santorum. Meanwhile, 12% of Asian Republicans and 78% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Bob Casey.

In the Virginia Senate race, 3% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate George Allen. Meanwhile, 18% of Asian Republicans and 74% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Jim Webb.

In the Maryland Senate race, 5% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Michael Steele. Meanwhile, 9% of Asian Republicans and 68% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Ben Cardin.

In the Massachusetts Gubernatorial race, 8% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Kerry Healey. Meanwhile, 26% of Asian Republicans and 73% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Deval Patrick.

In the Illinois Gubernatorial race, 2% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for

Republican candidate Judy Baar Topinka. Meanwhile, 39% of Asian Republicans and a solid 100% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Rod Blagojevich.

In the race for the Illinois 6<sup>th</sup> District, 5% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Peter Roskam. Meanwhile, 22% of Asian Republicans and 85% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Tammy Duckworth.

In New York's Attorney General race, 6% of Asian Democrats crossed party lines to vote for Republican candidate Jeanine Pirro. Meanwhile, 42% of Asian Republicans and 77% of those not enrolled in a party voted for Democratic candidate Andrew Cuomo.

In Michigan, 27% of Asian Democrats voted "Yes" to Proposal 2 in ending affirmative action programs. However, more than two of every three (67%) Asian Republicans voted "No" on

Proposal 2 in firm support of affirmative action. Ninety percent (90%) of those not enrolled in a party voted against Proposal 2.

### **III. Immigrant Rights**

In the spring of 2006, millions of immigrants and supporters marched in cities throughout the country demanding fair, humane immigration reform. These massive demonstrations thrust immigrant rights into the national consciousness and ignited contentious political debates. At issue was the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act (H.R. 4437) passed by the House in December 2005. This immigration bill would criminalize undocumented immigrants based on their status for the first time in U.S. history and subject them to deportation and imprisonment.

In late May of 2006, the Senate passed the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act (S. 2611) that would create a temporary guest worker program for immigrants and provide a path to legal status and possibly citizenship for some undocumented immigrants. The bill would also provide resources to clear immigration backlogs (some of which have a waiting list of 20 years) and promote family reunification.

Ensuing debates among politicians and mainstream news media focused around undocumented immigrants from Mexico, overlooking the Asian American stake in the issue. Indeed,

	<b>ALL ASIAN</b>	
	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>
<b>Creating a way for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Making being undocumented a crime</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Reducing the backlog in processing paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>11%</b>

AALDEF exit polls revealed that Asian American voters have strong opinions on key elements of immigration reform: legalization for undocumented immigrants, opposing the criminalization of undocumented immigrants, and the reduction of immigration backlogs.

#### **Creating a Way for Undocumented Immigrants to Legalize Their Status**

Of those who expressed an opinion, three out of four (75%) Asian American voters said they supported a way for undocumented immigrants to gain legal status, while a quarter (25%) opposed such a measure.<sup>22</sup> In addition, 78% of Asian Democrats favored legalization while

22% opposed it. Meanwhile, 62% of Asian Republicans favored legalization and 38% opposed it.

### **Making Being Undocumented a Crime**

Of those who expressed an opinion, 72% of Asian American voters opposed making being an undocumented immigrant a crime, while 28% favored making it a crime.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, 74% of Asian Democrats opposed the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and 26% favored it. Meanwhile, 56% of Asian Republicans opposed it and 44% favored making undocumented immigration status a crime.

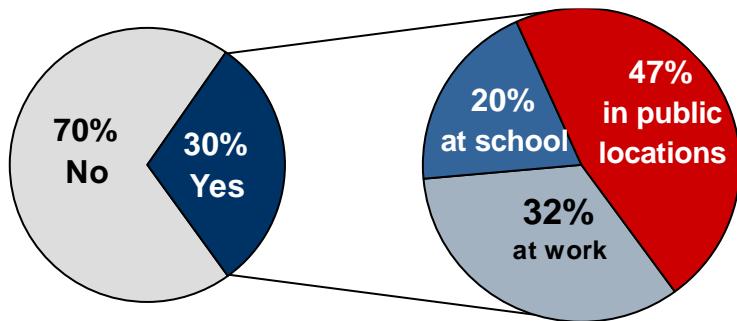
### **Reducing Immigration Backlogs**

Of those who expressed an opinion, nearly nine out of ten (89%) Asian American voters said they favored reducing the amount of time the government takes to process paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country. Eleven percent (11%) opposed a reduction in the amount of time to process immigrants.<sup>24</sup> Both Asian Democrats and Republicans overwhelmingly supported reducing the amount of time for immigrants waiting to enter the country. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of Asian Democrats and 88% of Asian Republicans were in favor of reducing immigration backlogs.

### **Anti-immigrant Sentiment**

National debates on immigration reform provoked a wave of anti-immigrant sentiment as many groups vocalized staunch opposition to all immigrants and demanded harsher border enforcement. Although “border enforcement” often meant the border between Mexico and the U.S., this backlash of xenophobia reached Asian American communities.

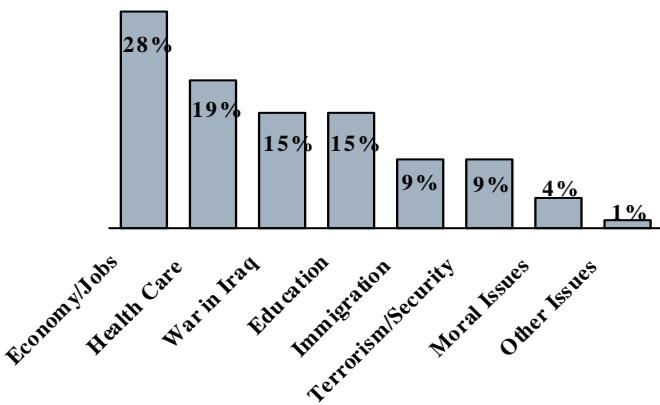
AALDEF asked voters to what extent they or their family had been affected by anti-immigrant attitudes. Of those who had an opinion, 30% of Asian American voters said they had been directly affected by anti-immigrant sentiment. Of those, nearly half (48%) said they had been



affected in public locations, 32% said they had been affected at work, and 20% said they had been affected at school.

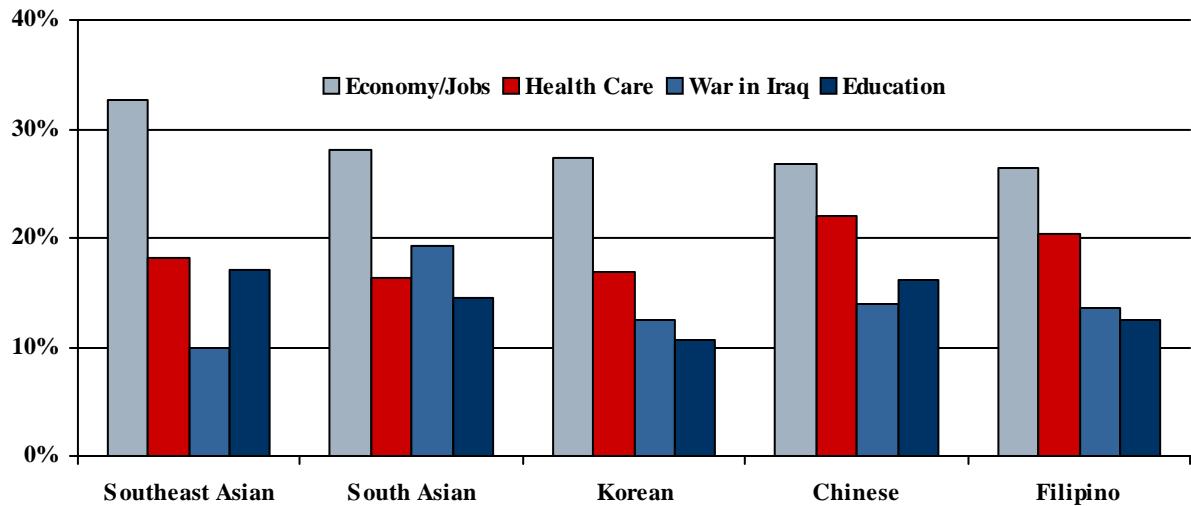
Asian American respondents in certain states were affected by anti-immigrant sentiment at an even higher rate. In Michigan, over half of all voters surveyed (51%) said they had been

affected by anti-immigrant sentiment. In Virginia, 39% of those surveyed had been affected. Over a third of Cambodian voters in all states (37%) were affected by anti-immigrant sentiment as well.



Jobs (28%); Health Care (19%); War in Iraq (15%); Education (15%); Immigration (9%); Terrorism/Security (9%); Moral Issues (4%); and Other Issues (1%).

In every state, Asian Americans of all ethnic backgrounds cited Economy/Jobs as the most



important issue to be addressed by future presidential candidates. Southeast Asians cited the issue at a rate of 33%, while South Asians cited it at 28%. Koreans, Chinese, and Filipinos each cited it at 27%.

Regardless of political party, Economy/Jobs was the number one issue for Asian Democrats (28%), for Asian Republicans (27%), and for those not enrolled in any party at (28%). Furthermore, for all three groups, Health Care was ranked as a second priority (19%, 16%, and 20%, respectively). Democrats and Republicans differed in their third top priority issue. Asian Republicans ranked Terrorism/Security as their third priority (14%). Asian Democrats, on the other hand, felt that the War in Iraq needed to be addressed much more than the issue of

#### IV. Most Important Issues to be Addressed by 2008 Presidential Candidates

For the two major political parties, there will be open races for the 2008 presidential candidates. AALDEF asked voters to identify three issues they wanted addressed by future presidential hopefuls. The most important issues Asian Americans wanted addressed by 2008 presidential candidates were: Economy/Jobs (28%); Health Care (19%); War in Iraq (15%); Education (15%); Immigration (9%); Terrorism/Security (9%); Moral Issues (4%); and Other Issues (1%).

## V. Access to the Vote

The federal Voting Rights Act (VRA) protects racial, ethnic and language minority voters. Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act guards against racial discrimination. Section 203 requires jurisdictions with large numbers of limited English proficient voting age citizens to provide translated ballots and interpreters at poll sites. Congress also enacted the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to remedy many voting problems highlighted in Florida in the 2000 elections. Additionally, several state laws and local election procedures protect Asian American and other minority voters.

### **Language Assistance**

The 2006 exit poll covered jurisdictions that were either legally required to provide or voluntarily provided language assistance to limited English proficient voters.

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act covers jurisdictions in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Washington for Asian language assistance. These jurisdictions must provide translated ballots, instructions, and other voting materials and interpreters at poll sites with large numbers of limited English proficient voters.

Only some jurisdictions covered by AALDEF's exit poll survey are required by the VRA to provide Asian language assistance. In New York City, Chinese language assistance is required in Kings County (Brooklyn) and New York County (Manhattan), and both Chinese and Korean are required in Queens County. In Seattle and Chicago, Chinese language assistance is required under the VRA.

In Boston, Massachusetts, Chinese and Vietnamese language assistance is required by the settlement reached in *U.S. v. City of Boston*, a lawsuit under Section 2 of the VRA.<sup>25</sup> Other jurisdictions in New Jersey, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Michigan (formerly under court order) voluntarily provide language assistance, most often in the form of interpreters at selected poll sites for particular Asian language minority voters.

Furthermore, under Section 208 of the Voting Rights Act, all voters have a right to be assisted by persons of their choice, and these individuals (most often a friend or family member) may enter voting booths to translate the ballot for voters. In jurisdictions where Asian American voters are growing in numbers but language assistance is not already provided, the Voting Rights Act allows them to bring their own interpreters.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents reported that they preferred voting with the help of an interpreter or translated voting materials. Yet, 46% actually used an interpreter, either provided by the city or brought by the voter, to help them vote. Thirty-eight percent (38%) used translated voting materials.

Ethnic Group	Limited English Proficient	Prefers Voting with Assistance	Used Interpreter	Used Translated Materials
<b><u>New York</u></b>				
• Chinese	61%	38%	56%	48%
• Korean	76%	37%	79%	60%
• Bangladeshi	38%	13%	18%	10%
• Pakistani	40%	17%	43%	13%
<b><u>New Jersey</u></b>				
• Korean	75%	28%	38%	35%
• Asian Indian	15%	8%	12%	9%
<b><u>Massachusetts</u></b>				
• Chinese	60%	42%	42%	59%
• Vietnamese	75%	53%	79%	69%
<b><u>Michigan</u></b>				
• Arab	34%	16%	47%	35%
<b><u>Pennsylvania</u></b>				
• Chinese	30%	17%	30%	9%
<b><u>Maryland</u></b>				
• Chinese	33%	18%	29%	10%
<b><u>Illinois</u></b>				
• Korean	88%	63%	61%	49%

In New York City, 79% of Korean American respondents and 56% of Chinese American respondents used an interpreter to help them vote. A majority of Korean American voters (60%) and nearly half of all Chinese American voters (48%) also used translated materials on Election Day. In Massachusetts, over half of all respondents (55%) used an interpreter to help them vote, including 42% of Chinese American voters and 79% of Vietnamese American voters. Overall, 63% of all Korean American voters, 51% of all Southeast Asian American voters, and 50% of all Chinese American voters needed the help of an interpreter on Election Day.

## Voting Barriers

Like other racial minorities, Asian Americans had to overcome a number of obstacles to exercise their right to vote. Among the numerous voting barriers they faced, many Asian Americans were required to present identification in order to vote, even though the Help America Vote Act only requires that certain first-time voters provide identification. However, nearly four out of five (78%) Asian American voters who were asked to present identification were not legally required to do so under HAVA. These voters were exempt from such requirements because they had either registered before 2003 (the year in which HAVA identification requirements came into effect) or had voted in a previous election. In New Jersey, 88% of voters asked for identification were not legally required to do so. In Illinois and New York, of those required to present identification, 84% and 83%, respectively, had registered before 2003 or were not first-time voters. In Massachusetts, 55% of those required to show identification were not legally required to do so.

Particular Asian ethnic groups were also unlawfully required to present identification before voting at higher rates than other Asian ethnic groups. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of Korean American voters and 89% of Filipino American voters who were required to show identification had either registered before 2003 or had voted in a previous election.

Asian Americans voters also reported a host of other voting problems:

- 148 voters did not cast a regular ballot and instead voted by provisional ballot.
- The names of 133 voters were not on the lists of registered voters.
- 100 voters complained that there were no interpreters or translations available to them.
- 59 voters complained of hostile or discourteous poll workers.
- 51 voters were directed to the wrong poll site or election district.
- 148 voters encountered other voting problems.

Overall, more than 200 individual voters filed official complaints with exit pollsters or via AALDEF's election hotline to report voting problems.

## **Conclusion**

The AALDEF multilingual exit poll showed Asian Americans to be a crucial political force in the 2006 midterm elections. Though diverse, the Asian American community agreed on important political issues including immigration reform, affirmative action, and the economy. The growing Asian American electorate has great potential to exert its political power in future elections. Elected officials and presidential candidates can no longer overlook the Asian American vote and must now recognize this growing voice in the American electorate.

## Acknowledgments

The following groups helped mobilize over 600 volunteers to conduct the exit poll and monitor poll sites:

### National Co-Sponsors

Asian Pacific Islander American Vote  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association  
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium  
Organization of Chinese Americans  
People For the American Way Foundation  
South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow  
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Asian American Lawyers Association of Massachusetts  
Asian Bar Association of Washington  
Asian Pacific American Bar Association of the Greater Washington, DC Area  
Asian Pacific American Lawyers Association of New Jersey  
Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center – DC  
Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia  
Chinatown Voter Education Alliance – NY  
Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans of Virginia  
Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership – DC  
Filipino American Human Services, Inc. – NY  
Greater Boston Legal Services, Asian Outreach Unit  
Korean American League for Civic Action – NY  
Korean American Resource & Cultural Center – IL  
Korean American Voters' Council of NY & NJ  
ONE Lowell – MA  
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition  
Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation  
Providence Youth and Student Movement – RI  
YKASEC–Empowering the Korean American Community – NY  
The Sikh Coalition – NY  
South Asian Youth Action! – NY  
Vietnamese American Initiative for Development – MA  
and Asian Pacific American Law Students Association chapters across the country.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> AALDEF surveyed nearly 11,000 Asian American voters in 8 states (NY, NJ, MA, MI, IL, PA, RI, VA) in 2004, 3,000 Asian voters in 4 states (NY, NJ, MA, MI) in 2002, and over 5,000 Asian New Yorkers in 2000.

<sup>2</sup> All percentages are based on total correct responses to survey questions. Questions left blank or incorrectly answered were not included in calculating percentages.

<sup>3</sup> Survey results based on “top-ballot races” only include Senate races in MD, NJ, PA, VA, and WA, Gubernatorial races in IL and MA, the NY state Attorney General race, and the DC Mayoral race. They do not include Congressional races in IL or Proposal 2 in MI.

<sup>4</sup> Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005 American Community Survey; U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census.

<sup>5</sup> Purposive sampling methodology was employed in this exit poll rather than random sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method that involves choosing respondents with certain characteristics.

<sup>6</sup> Indo-Caribbeans are ethnic Asian Indians who were brought to Caribbean nations, such as Guyana, Surinam, Trinidad, and Jamaica, as indentured servants over a century ago. Beginning in 1980 and throughout the 1990s, they have been migrating to the United States, specifically to New York.

<sup>7</sup> Although the U.S. Census Bureau designates Arabs as White, Arabs and other West Asians were included for this survey since South Asians and Arabs faced similar problems of discrimination and racial profiling, especially after September 11.

<sup>8</sup> Source: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-29.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/senate/>

<sup>10</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/house/>

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/NJ/S/01/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/PA/S/01/index.html>

<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/VA/S/01/index.html>

<sup>14</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/MD/S/01/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/IL/G/00/index.html>

<sup>16</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/MA/G/00/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/IL/H/06/>

<sup>18</sup> Source: [http://www.ny1.com/ny/Election/2006election/index.html?page\\_name=statewide](http://www.ny1.com/ny/Election/2006election/index.html?page_name=statewide)

<sup>19</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006//pages/results/states/MI/I/01/epolls.0.html>

<sup>20</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/ballot.measures/>

<sup>21</sup> Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006//pages/results/states/MI/I/01/epolls.0.html>

<sup>22</sup> Percentages for immigration questions exclude those responding “Not sure.” Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents were unsure about their opinion on creating a way for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status.

<sup>23</sup> Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents were unsure about their opinion on making being undocumented a crime.

<sup>24</sup> Twenty percent (20%) of respondents were unsure about their opinion on reducing immigration backlogs.

<sup>25</sup> Source: [http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/sec\\_203/documents/boston\\_cd2.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/sec_203/documents/boston_cd2.htm)

Founded in 1974, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. By combining litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all.

AALDEF focuses on critical issues affecting Asian Americans, including immigrant rights, civic participation and voting rights, economic justice for workers, language access to services, Census policy, affirmative action, youth rights and educational equity, and the elimination of anti-Asian violence, police misconduct, and human trafficking.

This report was written by Brian Redondo, AALDEF's Voting Rights Public Education Coordinator, with the assistance of Staff Attorney Glenn D. Magpantay and Executive Director Margaret Fung and data analysis by Nancy W. Yu.

**Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund**

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A SPECIAL PROJECT OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATION FUND



# The Asian American Vote

*A Report on the Multilingual Exit Poll*

*in the 2006 Midterm Elections*

**MASSACHUSETTS**

Percentage of Voters	Asian American respondents
100%	427 Total Surveyed
49	Women
51	Men
56	Chinese
27	Vietnamese
10	Cambodian
7	Other Asian
21	18 to 29 years old
17	30 to 39 years old
13	40 to 49 years old
19	50 to 59 years old
15	60 to 69 years old
15	70 and over
17	Born in the U.S.
83	Foreign born, naturalized citizen:
7	..... 0-2 years ago
13	..... 3-5 years ago
25	..... 6-10 years ago
38	..... More than 10 years ago
29	No formal education in the U.S.
	Educated in the U.S., highest level:
5	..... Elementary school
3	..... Less than high school
14	..... High school degree or equivalent
5	..... Trade school degree
32	..... College or university degree
12	..... Advanced degree

# Profile of Asian American Survey Respondents

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- **Boston (44%)**
- **Dorchester (28%)**
- **Quincy (16%)**
- **Lowell (12%)**

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## First Time Voting by Ethnicity

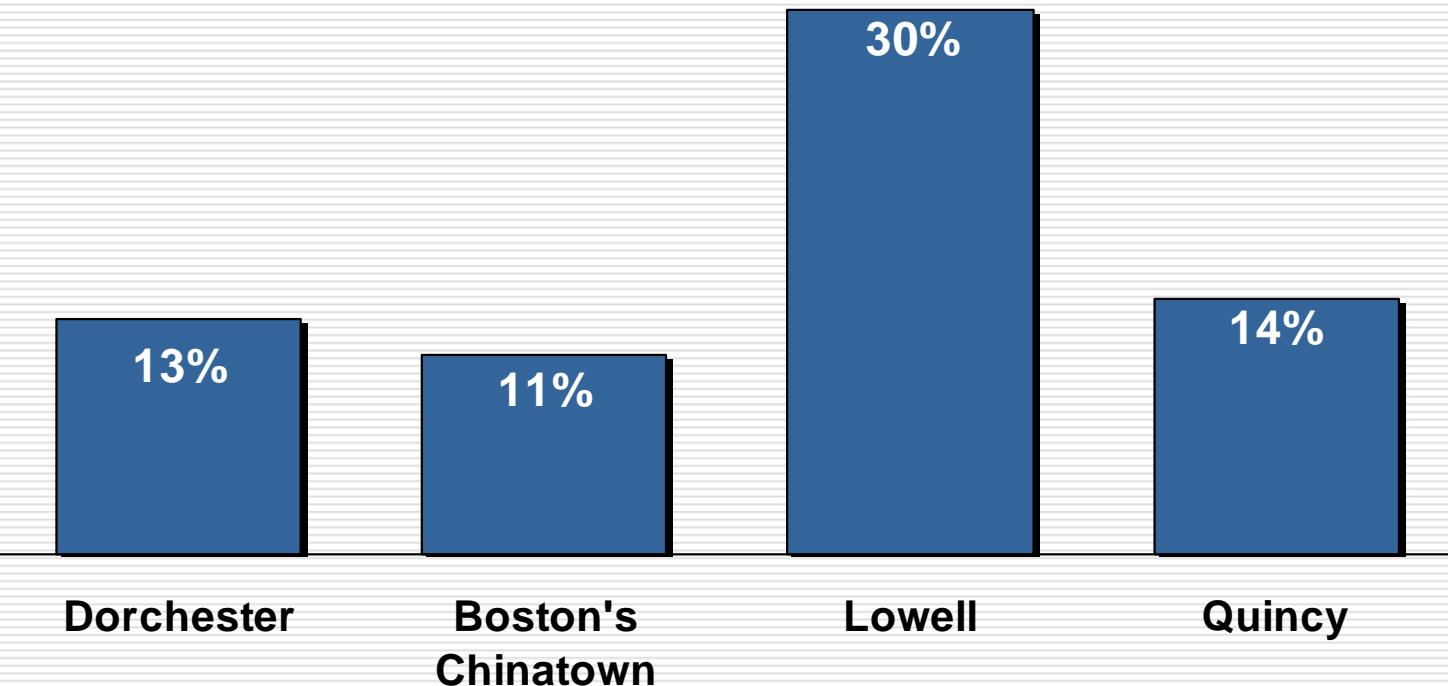
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Cambodian	29%
Vietnamese	14%
ALL ASIANS	14%
Chinese	12%

14% of Asian Americans voters said that they voted for the first time in the November 2006 midterm elections.

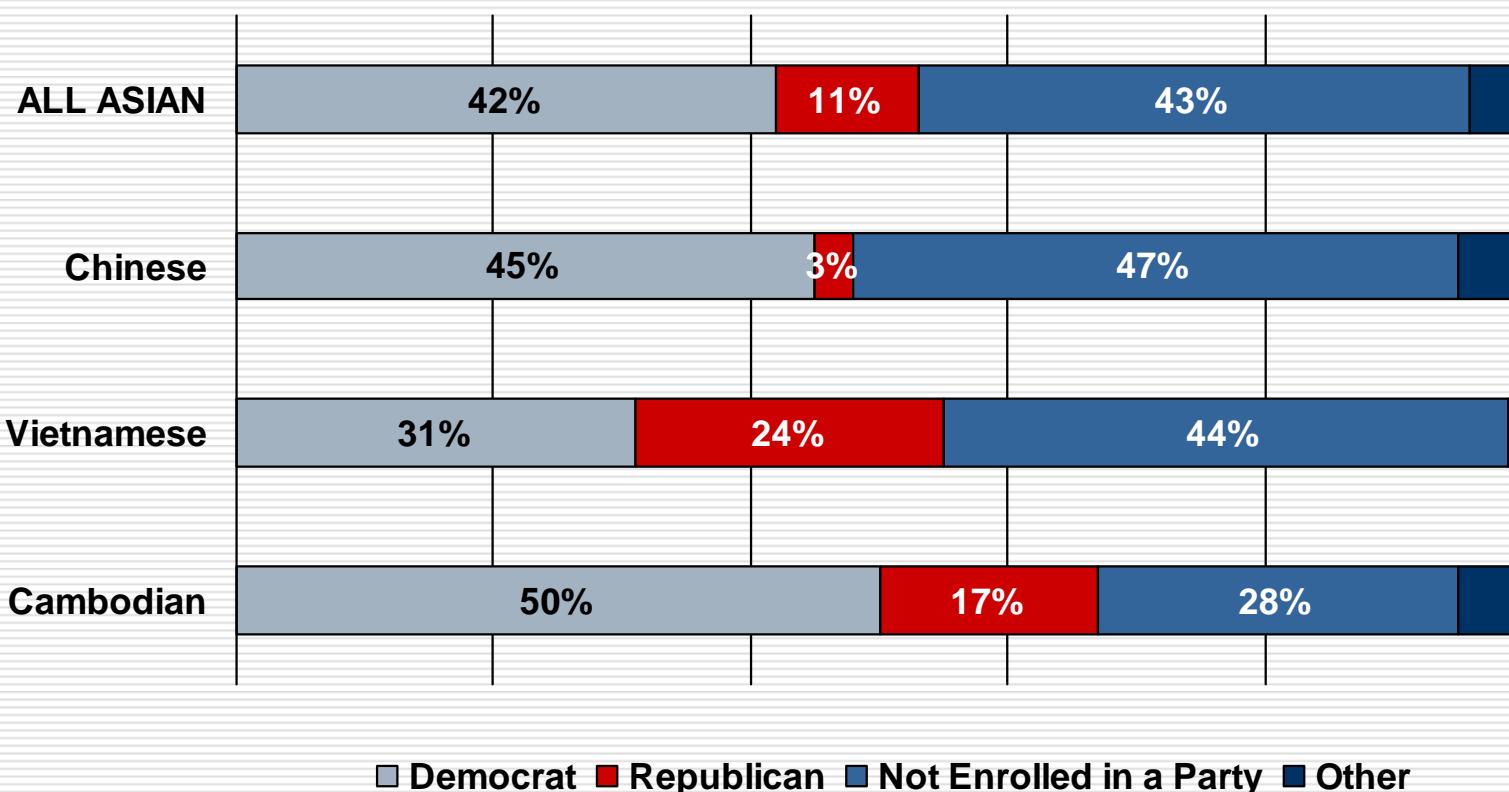
## First Time Voting by City/Neighborhood

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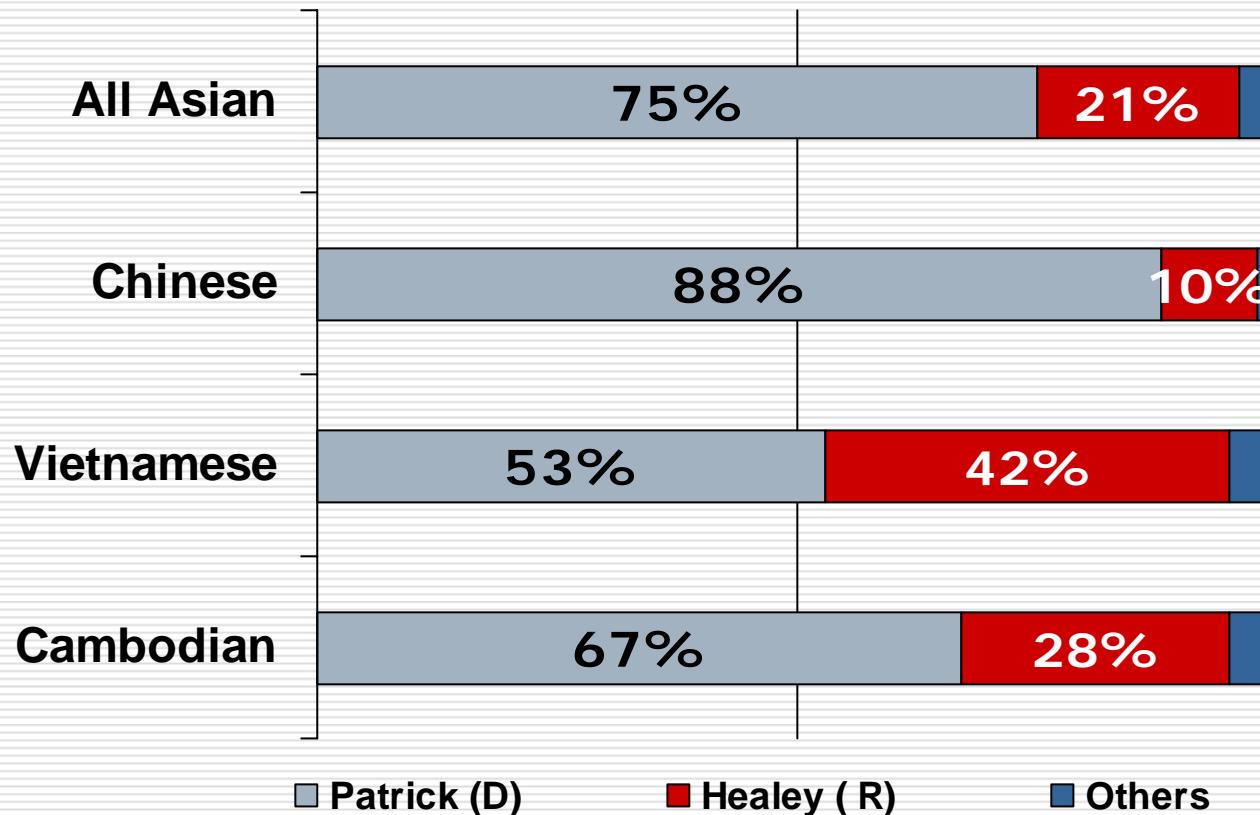
# Party Enrollment by Ethnicity

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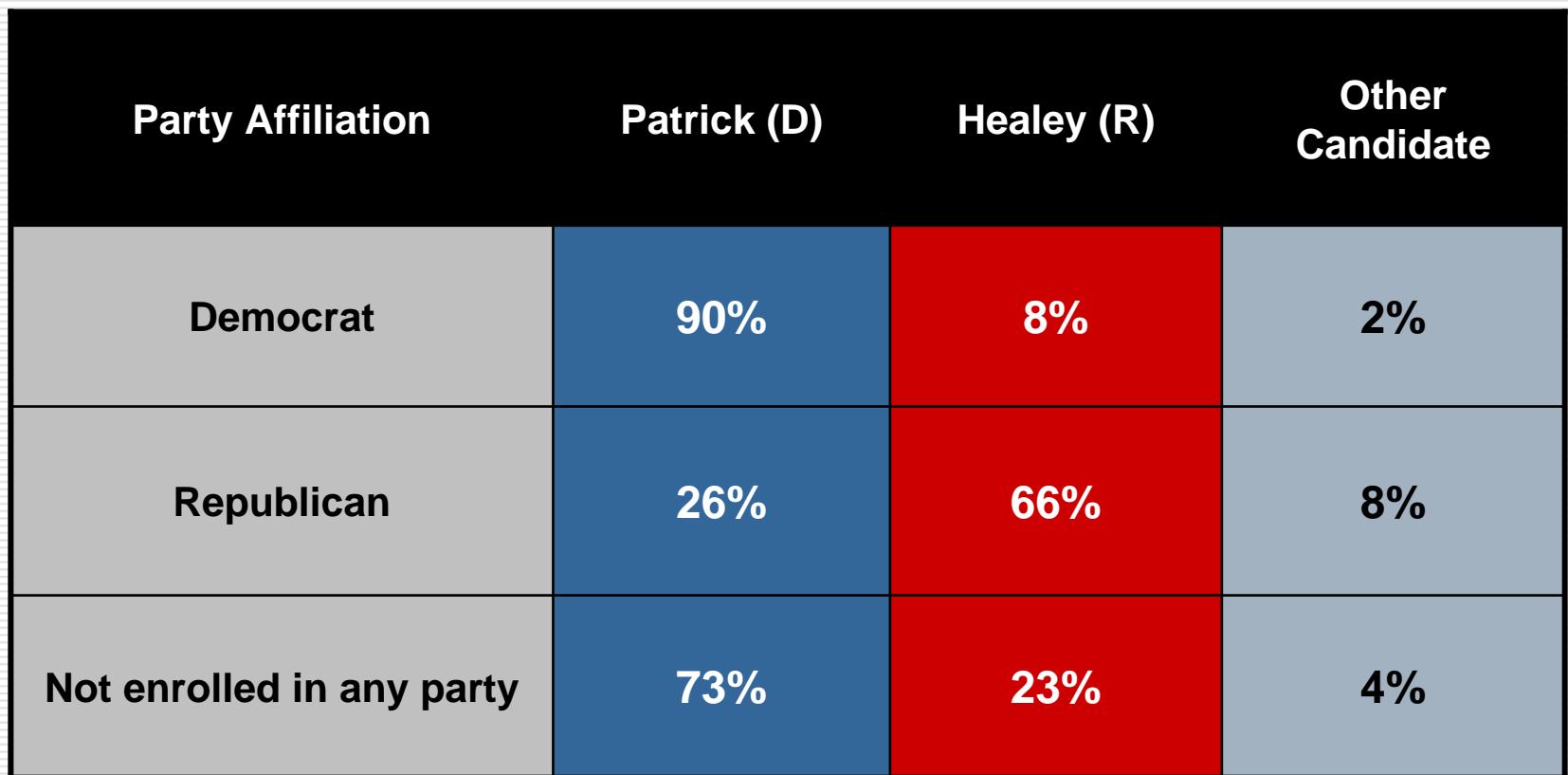
# Vote for Governor by Ethnicity

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# Vote for Governor by Party Affiliation

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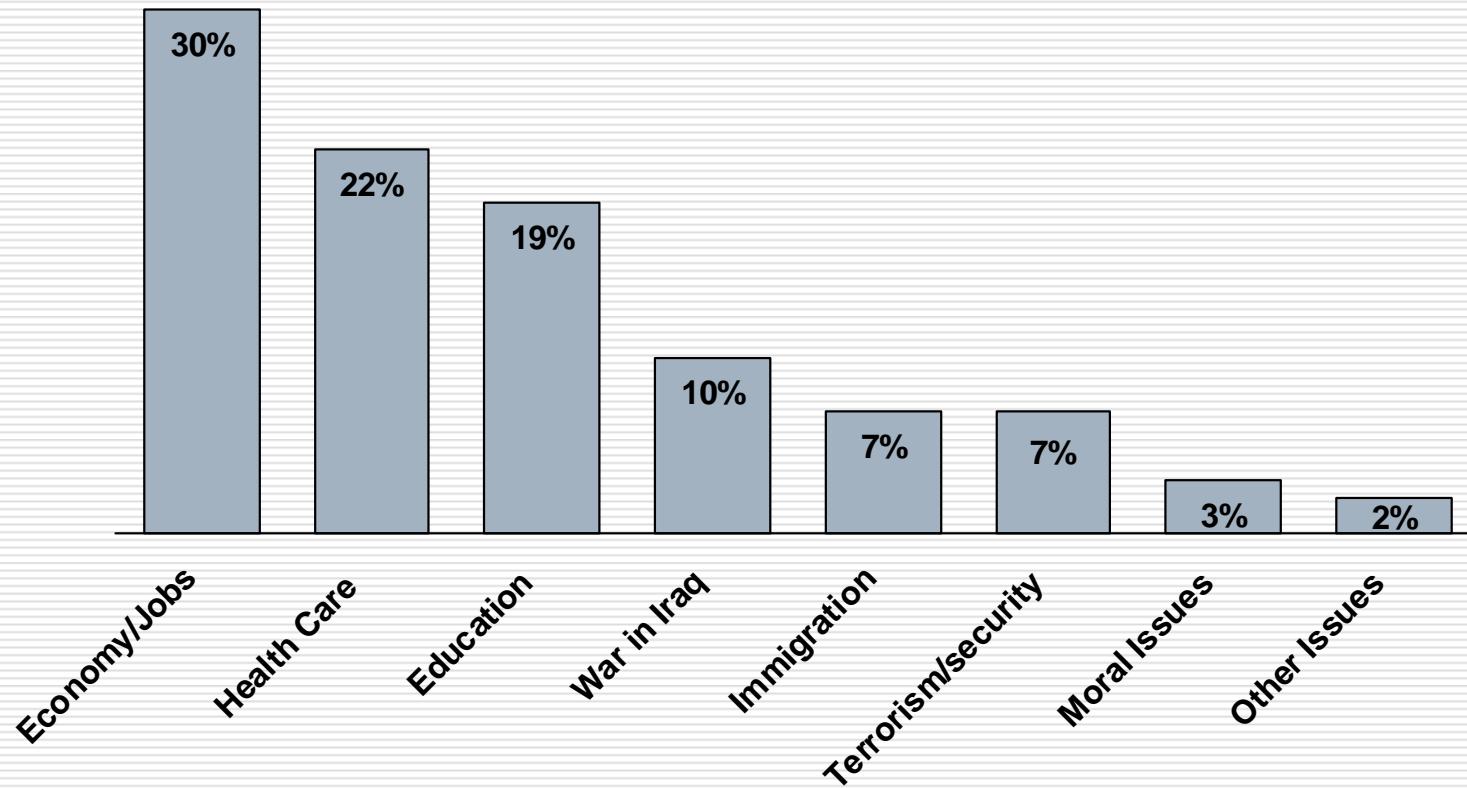
# Vote for Governor by City/Neighborhood

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Neighborhood	Patrick (D)	Healey (R)	Other Candidate
Boston's Chinatown	91%	7%	2%
Dorchester	55%	40%	5%
Quincy	76%	21%	3%
Lowell	63%	33%	4%

# Most Important Issues to be Addressed by 2008 Presidential Candidates

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# Attitudes on Immigration Reform

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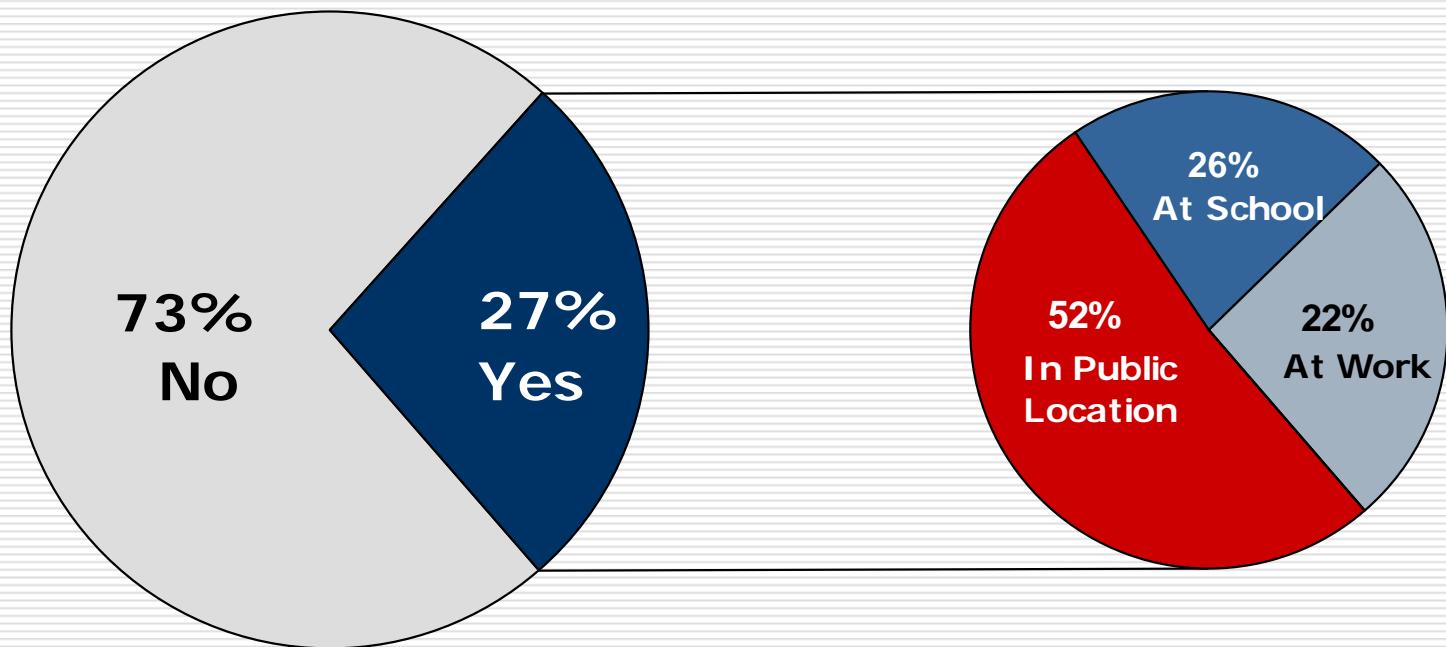
	ALL ASIAN	
	Favor	Oppose
Creating a way for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status	66%	34%
Making being undocumented a crime	37%	63%
Reducing the backlog in processing paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country	86%	14%

\*Percentages exclude those responding with "Not Sure."

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# Affected by Anti-Immigrant Sentiment

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# Limited English Proficiency

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- More than three out of every five (61%) Asian American respondents expressed that they were limited English proficient.
- Only 9% identified English as their native language.
- 75% of Vietnamese voters were limited English proficient.
- 50% of Cambodian voters were also limited English proficient.



Photo by Joseph Hsu, *World Journal*

- 60% of Chinese voters also expressed some difficulty with reading English.

# Need for Language Assistance by Language

---

Poll Sites	Limited English Proficient	Prefers Voting with Assistance	Used an Interpreter	Used Translated Written Materials
Boston Chinatown (Chinese Only)	63%	50%	45%	69%
Dorchester (Vietnamese Only)	80%	58%	85%	73%
Lowell (Cambodian Only)	50%	32%	64%	42%

## Voting Barriers

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- Identification is generally *not* a prerequisite to voting.
- HAVA requires that certain first-time voters must provide identification. Other voters were *generally exempt* from these voting requirements.
- However, 55% of Asian voters asked to show identification were not legally required to do so.
- The interpreter at a poll site in the South End in Boston asked each Chinese-speaking voter for his or her ID.

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# Other Voting Problems

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- Voters' names were not on the lists of registered voters.**
  - Four voters in Quincy complained that they had to vote by provisional ballots because their names were missing from lists of voters at their poll site.
- Voters complained that poll workers were poorly trained.**
  - After an elder Vietnamese woman voted at a poll site in Dorchester, poll workers informed the voter that her vote did not go through and did not offer any explanations as why or if there was any remedy.
  - The Vietnamese interpreter at one poll site in Boston was unfamiliar with technical terms such as "provisional ballot."
- Voters did not receive adequate notification of their poll site assignments prior to the election.**
  - One voter in Lowell said he did not receive adequate notice of his poll site, and he was redirected to another, more distant poll site.

## Co-Sponsors of the Asian American Exit Poll:

Asian Pacific Islander American Vote  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association  
Nat'l Korean American Service & Educ. Consortium  
Organization of Chinese Americans  
People For the American Way Foundation  
South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow  
Shearman & Sterling LLP  
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Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center – DC  
Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia  
Chinatown Voter Education Alliance – NY  
Coalition of Asian Pacific Americans of Virginia  
Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership - DC  
Filipino American Human Services, Inc. – NY  
Greater Boston Legal Services, Asian Outreach Unit  
Korean American League for Civic Action – NY  
Korean American Resource & Cultural Center – IL  
Korean American Voters' Council of NY & NJ  
ONE Lowell – MA  
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition  
Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation  
Providence Youth and Student Movement – RI  
YKASEC–Empowering the Korean American Community – NY  
The Sikh Coalition – NY  
South Asian Youth Action! – NY  
Vietnamese American Initiative for Development – MA  
and Asian Pacific American Law Students Association chapters across the country

For more information about these findings, contact AALDEF at

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Email: [info@aaldef.org](mailto:info@aaldef.org)  
Website: [www.aaldef.org](http://www.aaldef.org)

### **The Asian American Vote in Massachusetts**

On Election Day, November 7, 2006, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), with the help of several co-sponsoring organizations and more than 600 attorneys, law students, and volunteers, conducted a nonpartisan, multilingual exit poll of over 4,700 Asian American voters. The questionnaire was available in English and nine Asian languages. Voters were surveyed in 23 cities across nine states—New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Illinois, Washington—as well as Washington, D.C.

AALDEF surveyed a total of 427 Massachusetts Asian American voters. Respondents were surveyed in Boston's Chinatown, Dorchester, Quincy and Lowell. Highlights of the findings include:

- Profile of respondents.**

The three largest ethnic groups surveyed in Massachusetts were Chinese (56%), Vietnamese (27%), and Cambodian (10%). Eighty-three percent (83%) were foreign-born citizens. Over a third (37%) of respondents had either no formal U.S. education or less than a high school education. Fourteen percent (14%) were first-time voters.

- The majority of Asian Americans voted for Democratic candidate Deval Patrick for Massachusetts governor.**

Three out of four (75%) Asian American voters supported Democratic candidate Deval Patrick in his bid for governor. Twenty-one percent (21%) voted for Republican candidate Kerry Healey, and four percent (4%) voted for other candidates. Among the total electorate, Patrick won 56% of the vote, while Healey won 35%.

- “Economy/Jobs” was the most important issue Asian Americans identified for 2008 Presidential candidates to address.**

The three most important issues for 2008 presidential candidates to address were: Economy/Jobs (30%), Health Care (22%), and Education (20%).

- Most Asian Americans were either registered Democrats or not enrolled in any political party.**

Forty-two percent (42%) of Massachusetts Asian Americans were registered Democrats, and 43% were not enrolled in any political party. In contrast, 11% were registered Republicans. Forty-five percent (45%) of Chinese voters were registered Democrats, 3% were Republicans, and nearly half (47%) were not enrolled in any political party. A third (31%) of Vietnamese voters were registered Democrats, a quarter (24%) were Republicans, and 44% were not affiliated with any party. Half (50%) of all Cambodian voters were registered Democrats, 17% were Republicans, and 29% were not enrolled in any political party.

- Asian Americans supported legalization of undocumented immigrants and reducing immigration backlogs, while they opposed making being undocumented a crime.**

Of those who gave an opinion, 66% of respondents said they favored creating a way for undocumented immigrants to legalize their status. Additionally, 86% of respondents said they favored reducing the amount of time the government takes to process paperwork for immigrants waiting to enter the country. Three in five (63%) respondents also said they opposed making being undocumented a crime.

- Many Asian Americans have been affected by anti-immigrant sentiment.**

Twenty-seven percent (27%) of respondents said they had been affected by anti-immigrant sentiment in at least one of the following locations: at work, at school, or in a public location. Of those, half (50%) said they had been affected by anti-immigrant sentiment in public locations.

- Language assistance and translated ballots are needed to preserve access to the vote.**

Seventy-five percent (75%) of Vietnamese American voters, sixty percent (60%) of Chinese American voters, and half (50%) of all Cambodian American voters were limited English proficient. Less than 10% of all respondents identified English as their native language. Over half (55%) of respondents used interpreters to vote, and 55% used translated written materials.

- Asian American voters encountered unlawful ID requirements.**

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 requires that only certain first-time voters provide identification to vote. Yet 55% of those asked to show identification in order to vote were not required to do so under this federal law.

**AALDEF Exit Polls**

AALDEF has conducted exit polls of Asian American voters in every major election since 1988. Nearly 11,000 Asian American voters in eight states (NY, NJ, MA, MI, IL, PA, RI, VA) were surveyed in AALDEF's 2004 exit poll. Over 3,000 Asian American voters in four states (NY, NJ, MA, MI) were surveyed in 2002, and over 5,000 Asian New Yorkers were surveyed in 2000.

**National Co-Sponsors of the Asian American Exit Poll 2006:**

Asian Pacific Islander American Vote  
 Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
 National Asian Pacific American Bar Association  
 National Korean American Service & Education Consortium  
 Organization of Chinese Americans  
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**Local Co-Sponsors of the Asian American Exit Poll 2006:**

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 Asian Bar Association of Washington  
 Asian Pacific American Bar Association of the Greater Washington, DC Area  
 Asian Pacific American Lawyers Association of New Jersey  
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 The Sikh Coalition – NY  
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 and Asian Pacific American Law Students Association chapters across the country.

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The Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), founded in 1974, is a national organization that protects and promotes the civil rights of Asian Americans. By combining litigation, advocacy, education, and organizing, AALDEF works with Asian American communities across the country to secure human rights for all.